

# Our Image

The BP Review Supplement

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## A gay world after all

Marsden Hartley (1877-1943)  
by Michael Lynch

Ten years before he died, Hart Crane was still dosed enough to ask a friend to keep secret his sexuality. "Such things have a wholesome way of leaking out!" he wrote. "Everyone knows now about Bynner, Hartley, and others — the list is too long to bother with." While it's odd to hear such words from Crane — the drunken and visionary Hart who within a few years would be shouting "I am Walt Whitman!" — his reasoning was familiar. Living at the time in Cleveland, he found "the ordinary business of earning a living entirely too stringent to want to add any prejudices against me of that nature in the minds of any publicans and sinners."

But the comment indicates something of Marsden Hartley's and Witter Bynner's reputations in 1923, of their fame "in bohemian circles" as one of Crane's biographers put it, "for their flamboyant conduct." Crane and Bynner were known as gay men, gay writers. But Marsden Hartley? As a painter — about whom his friend and sponsor Gertrude Stein said, "He deals with colors as actually as Picasso deals with forms" — he is, rightly, best known. As a poet — to whom Allen Ginsberg recently called "the poet as honest man, crank, goof, correct minded queer, voice out of the pavement" — he is less known. As a writer of prose, somewhat unknown. As a gay man in a gay world: hardly known at all.

It is Hartley as homosexual that interests me here. For although his sexuality informed much of his life, his sensibility, and his art, it has been dealt with but passingly or ineptly in recent writing about him. Elsewhere I will address what I take to be the livelier question: the bearing of his sexuality on his art. But here I offer notes toward his biography, notes on a life of color, loneliness, fringes, searching, homoerotic idealism, and, in various forms, of gay community.

1877 marks the centenary of Edmund Hartley's birth on January 4 in the small mill-town of Lewiston, Maine. Here the broad Androscoggin River passes over a series of rocky falls to edify the eye and empower the factories. His parents had married after immigrating, separately, from near Manchester, England; Thomas, his father, first worked as a cotton spinner and later became a bill poster for a local theatre. Edmund was the youngest of nine children. When he began selling his paintings, around the age of thirty, he began substituting "Marsden" for his given name. It was the

maiden name of his stepmother.

He lived in Lewiston/Auburn until he was fifteen, then moved with part of his family to Cleveland where he worked in a marble quarry and began painting. In November, 1899 he arrived in New York, on an art's scholarship, to learn his craft. From this time until he died in 1943 in Ellsworth, Maine, Hartley was peregrine, hardly ever living in one place more than a year at a time. But the two geographic centres of his life were to remain Maine, whose lonely coasts, seabirds, and fishermen drew him back again and again, and bohemian New York, where an artistic and gay community nourished him as New England never could.

Surprisingly, his introduction to a living gay tradition seems to have come not in Greenwich Village but in Maine. In 1905 he met a circle of Whitman admirers and quickly grew close to them. Among these were William Sloan Kennedy, who gave Hartley a signed portrait of Whitman which Whitman had given him just before he died; Thomas Bird Mosher, the socialist Maine publisher of Whitman and one of the earliest American publishers of Oscar Wilde, and Horace Traubel, socialist editor of the *Conservator*, Whitman's secretary and biographer.

Although each of these figures was later to reject as repugnant the notion of Whitman's, or their own, homosexuality shortly before committing suicide in the twenties, Kennedy, for example, would write virulently about John Addington Symonds' view of Whitman:

most [American readers] won't know what Symonds is driving at. Our ancestors did not import these infatigable Oriental vices into America.

— they were not, at this time, so homophobic. During the next three years Hartley corresponded frequently with Traubel, and in 1908 wrote to the Irish poet Seamus O'Sheel of his affection for Mosher and Traubel, mentioning that he had received a number of beautiful love letters from Traubel over the past three years. These letters, which still exist, are brief, ecstatic, and tender.

Hartley even met, through this coterie, Whitman's lover Peter Doyle. Having graduated from conducting a Washington streetcar, where Whitman first met him, to the New York-New Haven railway, Doyle was now in his sixties, retired from beer, and reticent to talk about Whitman.



Adelard the Drowned, Master of the Phantom (1938/39).

What a spectacle is Adelard...

He lives utterly for the consummate satisfaction of the flesh, the kind of flesh making no difference...

He has no common codes, no inhibitions — he will give as much love to a man as to a woman, he was totally loved by all of them up and down the coast, and because he was thrown over by the first woman, I think he has transferred his affections to his men friends for he loves them and will do anything for them, and with this comes no mercy, love for him being the outpouring of his devastating energy — all flame, smoke, fire, steam and animal hissing, he is thunder and lightning in one, and loves when he strikes — it is the measure of his common quietude.

from "Cleophas and His Own" by Marsden Hartley

Hartley's two prose sketches of these meetings remain. In one he tells of wanting to query Coyle about Whitman's "lady in New Orleans" and reputed "children"; after failing to ask Doyle, he asked Traubel and "got nothing but a quiet smile on that."

Hartley spent the summer of 1907 in a utopian community in Greenacre, Maine, which attracted the Traubel group as well as other socialists and feminists. "Their special gods," Robert Burlingame has noted, "included Henry George, Karl Marx, and Walt Whitman." But although Hartley retained vague political sympathies during his life, the homoerotic idealism of this group affected him most. Whitman was, and remained a lover-god. Sometime before 1908 he painted "Walt Whitman's House, 328 Mickle Street, Camden", later he did an etching of Whitman's New York birthplace. Towards the end of his life he returned to a Whitman-like affection in three portraits of, and two poems about, Abraham Lincoln:

I have seen infinite mercies  
on his woman's lower lip  
in the same way I have seen  
determination

upon his man's upper.  
Pity has poured out from between  
these massive portals.  
Majesty of love has walked out  
of them  
clothed in amazingly decent garments.

Lincoln's face "is the one great face for me and I never tire of looking at it," Hartley wrote. "I am simply dead in love with that man."

In 1909 Hartley gave his first show at the "Photo-Session Gallery," better known as "291," the influential small gallery operated by Alfred Steiglitz who was to give Hartley both regular shows and financial support over the next thirty years. Steiglitz helped, in 1912, to send Hartley off to Europe where his gay life, as the life of his art, came into its own. In Paris he met Gertrude Stein, who, a year later, would write one of her verbal "portraits" of him. He met Charles Oernuth, the other important gay painter of his generation, some of whose homoerotic paintings have only recently come to light. Hartley and Oernuth would remain friends until Oernuth's death in 1935. And he met Karl von Freyburg, a twenty-two year old German soldier with whom he fell in love.

After meeting Franz Marc and Wassily

## Books Mass Media The Arts



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Kandinsky in Munich, Hartley settled in Berlin in 1913 where he found tremendous excitement. "I had never felt such voluptuous tension in the air anywhere," he wrote Stein. The bright military pageantry, the vivacious gay bars, and the proximity of Demuth and von Freyburg thrilled him.

Except for one trip back home, Hartley remained in Berlin until December, 1915. He was painting a series of large abstractions which have had a formative impact upon the abstract expressionism

"love squashed flat into patterns of admiration."

Twenty-four years later Hartley wrote a deeply moving "letter" to Karl von Freyburg that will, if it is ever published, be treasured wherever men derive their deeper dreams and higher ideas from the love of other men. With gentle humor it recalls Karl, speculates on his current condition, blends Hartley's lifelong fascination with tringes and borders into the politics of the 1938 Anschluss. And it recalls a dream in

but five years Hartley's junior, who in 1917 dedicated his book of poems called **Children of the Sun** to Hartley.

In 1920-21 he shared a New York apartment with an accomplice, George de Winter. (We can glimpse Hartley, during this period, in the figure of Brander Ogden in McAlmon's story "Post-Adolescence.") In mid-1921, however, he returned to Europe: Paris first, which he found dead, and then his real goal, Berlin. Here he had, as McAlmon later wrote, "friends among the theatrical and artistic people." Here he found a high life along the low life. McAlmon set the scene.

Hirschfeld was conducting his psychoanalytic school and a number of souls unsure of their sexes or of their inhibitions coppled with each other in looking or acting freakishly, several Germans declared themselves authentic hermaphrodites, and one elderly variant loved to arrive at the smart cabarets each time as a different type of woman: elegant, or as a washerwoman, or a street vendor, or as a modest mother of a family. He was very comical and his presence always made for hilarity, as did the presence of a chorus boy from New York. The chorus boy was on in years, but he was exceedingly neat, clean, and was ribaldly outright and extremely weird.

Like McAlmon, Hartley became friends with Diana Barnes during this period, and also with the Berlin originals for some of her **Nightwood** characters, including that of Dr. Matthew O'Connor. Years later Hartley would find this novel too hypocritically lurid, much as he would find Crane's alcoholic and sexual exhibitions excessive. **Nightwood**, he said, reminded him of Baron Corvo.

In the fifteen years between his return to Berlin and his 1936 tragedy-laden sojourn in Nova Scotia, Hartley lived in many places and developed many subjects in his paintings: still lifes, mountainscapes, the primitive rock formations of Dogtown, Massachusetts, arcane symbols from the literature of mysticism. He was increasingly reading. Whatever his sexual activity — and there's no reason to think he was any more chaste now than he had been in his thirties — his reaction to homosexuality seems increasingly to have polarized: homoeroticism was more and more linked to an ideal, a religion, to what was and later became Christ as the divine and suffering lover, and it was more and more repugnant as he saw it in Hart Crane. But in the middle ground, where he sought to live, he found a gay loneliness which led him both to treasure isolated places and things and to seek the community which mellow male friendships provided.

Crane he had first met in 1924 in Brooklyn when Hart was living with Emil Opfer, was writing "Voyages" and beginning **The Bridge**. In 1929 they met accidentally in Marseilles; Crane, Hartley said, "was running for Cradock" and Crane, Cannabiere in search of some phantom of other. And in 1932 in Mexico they spent hours together during the turbulent last month of Crane's life. Crane's suicide at sea overwhelmed Hartley much as the death of von Freyburg had. He wrote a letter to Crane in 1934: "You is love, Hart, and you were loved" — the echoed "Lycidas," Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Whitman's great love-death poem, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." He painted "Eight Bellis Folly," one of his few symbolist paintings that accordingly for Crane — "You is love, prose becomes recalling Crane with consider- able agitation and evasion. Crane the skilled singer of Platonic harmonies enthralled him. Crane the driven seeker of Dionysian ecstasies appeared and fascinated him. But during this last month, it was turning to John Underaker. Hart was one of the few persons Crane trusted.

In 1931, '34, and '36, Hartley spent time in the artists' community in Gloucester, Massachusetts; Charles Olson later remarked in **Maximus**, Hartley's eyes, his hands "refusing woman's flesh," and



Finnish-Yankee Sauna (1938-39).

The nudes' emphatic musculature, nipples, and genitals made their erotic power inescapable — and so embarrassing to most historians that, as William Gerdtz has written, the male nudes are "perhaps the least studied aspect of Hartley's art."

of our own era. In a way, though, these were less abstractions than still lifes based on parts of military uniforms, insignias, flags, and symbols such as iron crosses, panoplied horses, and stars. Hartley had experimented with abstractionism as early as 1911, and it is ironic that his 1911 "Abstraction" was painted on the back of a cardboard piece cut from one of Hartley's earliest known paintings — a male nude, ironic because much of the charge of the designs in these Berlin abstractions was homoerotic, part of Hartley's response to the handsome soldiers who abounded in the city. And because the latter half of this series was a one-laden reaction to the death of Karl von Freyburg.

Lieutenant von Freyburg was killed on 7 October 1914 in Arras, one of the first casualties of the looming war. Hartley's grief was overwhelming. It poured out in letter after letter. Karl's beauty, charm, and grace became a symbol for all beauty, especially for that of the young men who were heading, from both sides, toward death along that lengthening line. The vocabulary of the abstractions served to express this grief — and one notes that it was a fortunate evasion to explicit homoerotic "content" even as it engaged the intense homoerotic emotions. The canvases were usually covered with a brilliant black ground, and the vivid designs over this often included the initials KvF and the number 24, Karl's age at his death. They are, to borrow a phrase from a Hartley poem,

which Karl appeared in full uniform, but pure white, purged of all its military significance — testimony to what he had maintained since the first Berlin years: that his paintings did not celebrate militarism but the male beauty which brought out.

Forced by the war to return to the U.S., Hartley drifted out of New York for periods in Provincetown (during its famous summer of 1917), Maine, Bermuda (with Charles Demuth), and (like other New York painters of the day) Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico. In Cape Cod he met Carl Sprinchorn, a young Swedish painter who was to become his lifelong friend, who would himself settle in Maine and paint charmingly and exhaustively almost every phase of lumberjack life. Through Sprinchorn, Robert Burlingame writes, Hartley "was able to ease the pain of his memory of Freyburg's death." During a brief stay in California he met the gay writer and publisher Robert McAlmon (whose notorious Village wedding to the lesbian writer Bryher in 1921 Hartley would attend). He was introduced, by Sprinchorn, to the work of Rex Sinkard, a young poet recently killed in the influenza epidemic, whose fervent tenderness in letters and paintings led Hartley to write a catalogue introduction for a memorial exhibition.

Somewhere along the way he'd become friends with Wallace Gould, a giant of a man, gay, also from Lewiston

### Contributors

- Will Aiken**, a freelance journalist and writer, teaches English at Vanier College in Montreal.
- Christie Bearchell**, a 23 year old lesbian feminist and socialist, is a member of the Lesbian Caucus of GATE (Toronto) and former chairperson of the Committee to Defend John Damien.
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- Graham Jackson** is a Toronto writer. A collection of his short stories, **Gardens**, was recently published by Catalyst Press.
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- Robert Padgug**, 33, is a professor of history at Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey. He is in the process of being fired, tenure having been denied.
- Cheryl Pruitt** is a lesbian activist and singer who presently lives in Toronto.
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- Ian Young**, well-known poet living in Scarborough, Ontario, founded the gay publishing house, Catalyst Press.

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Painting No. 47, Berlin (1914-15)

## Gay World

It's a gay world after all, I knew it was, only there are so many things that make it dark and much beside the point not to say cheaply, utterly out of joint. I like to call it gay, this world, because if I didn't know most of these folks like flags in the wind unfurled, I would be inclined to say — "tiresome world, troublesome world, how do you get that way?" But these folks I know, or certainly would want to know if I didn't, makes it seem like a gay world to me. Of course tomorrow we might all be feeling different. Truth to tell in all probability will. I like'em now very much and that will do, I'll say.



Marsden Hartley not long before he died in 1943, photographed by his friend George Platt Lynes.

his humanizing "transubstantiations/as I am not permitted".

such doth he tamed all things to, made palms of hands of gulls, Maine monoliths apostles, a meal of fish a final supper —made Crane a Marseilles matelot.

Olson spoke true. For Hartley's idealism was directed, as Whitman's and Hopkins had been, not just towards elevating the human but towards humanizing the ideal. As with Hopkins whose poetry he imitated he focused on Christ as a lovely and loving man, admired especially the Christ and apostles of Masaccio in "The Tribute Money" at Florence. (Whether he knew the old tradition that Masaccio was gay I don't yet know.) Hartley's "ideal" was gentle, warm, tender, as he himself was behind his rather aloof Maine manner. Mabel Dodge was only partly right to call him "a New England spinsterman" and Alexander Eliot just plain misunderstands when he calls Hartley "a Puritanical bachelor" and offers in advance Hartley's very 1942 explanation of why he wasn't married.

Everyone's been in love, but I could never afford to get married. As a matter of fact I don't know what kind of husband I'd have made. I know I make a good friend. But a husband —

"Friendship" was a charged and usefully ambiguous word for Hartley as for several centuries of gay men; but it was not "Puritanical".

The emotional crisis of Hartley's old age occurred in 1936. During the previous year, in search of a North Atlantic setting yet starker than Maine, he settled on a small island in Mahone Bay, off the coast from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Here he lived with a fishing family, the Masons, in whom he found a primitive simplicity and strength. It was the life of one of the two fringes which he had often sought; rather than the urban kaleidoscope of Berlin, Paris, or Greenwich Village, this gave the direct force of the coast and its unsophisticated people.

If Hartley admired Francis Mason and his wife as if they were primitive forces themselves, it was their two sons, great hulking fishermen, whom he adored. He even described his pleasure in scrubbing the massive back of one of them at bath-time. In September 1936, these two alone with their young cousin were washed from their punt in a storm and drowned. As their bodies washed ashore over the next week, mutilated by the sea, Hartley watched the community's stoic acceptance of the sea's power — and grieved.

"The six remaining years of Hartley's life were, in many respects," writes Robert Burlingame, "the denouement of this tragedy." The most stirring prose narrative of his life, **Cleophas and His Own**, emerged from this; if it is ever published, men who love men may treasure it as we do some of the **Calamus** poems. It concludes:

I went to the cemetery before I left, I told no one. I didn't want anyone around — the seagulls swirled over my head, the fence blew furiously around my body, the white fence showed where their estate began and ended, I looked down into the earth as far as I could and I said, only the seagulls hearing —

"Adelard and Etienne, I loved you more than myself. I love you because I was equal with you in every way but the strength, and it was the strength that fortified me — I truly loved you." I did not wait for plausible replies, I could only hear the wind rustling among the paper flowers, twisting their worn petals east to west.

But not by prose alone did Hartley remember Adelard and Etienne (their fictional names) — and von Freyburg, Slinkard, Crane, even Masaccio — all dead, dead ere their prime. There were poems. There were at least two drawings and seven paintings of the Mason family, all considered studies for a fishermen's chapel which Hartley hoped to erect but

never did. Of these, the most stirring is that of Adelard reproduced at the beginning of this article (with his description from **Cleophas and His Own**), an archaic figure against a passionate red background, his shirt open to expose a hairy chest, his black hair smoking right over his forehead, and behind his left ear a delicate pink flower.

There were other paintings deriving from this crisis, too. Even more than in the "Adelard," Hartley captured the sacred power of the place in paintings such as the "Morning Seascape, Off the Banks." The natural sacramental power he painted in "Give Us This Day" and other compositions of seagulls on the wing.

There were also male nudes. In Berlin in the early 20's Hartley had done some pen and ink drawings of male nudes and at least one oil canvas, but no others are known until around 1936-42 when he drew several series of nudes and painted perhaps a dozen more. Sometimes these shade into homoerotic religious themes, as in "Christ Held by the Half-Naked Men," but more often they are directly sensual, as in "Lifesaver." Of particular interest to a modern gay reviewer are the "Finnish-Yankee Sauna" and "Finnish-Yankee Wrestler" (both 1936-39), the first a group of four male nudes and the second an individual. Charles Demuth had, as early as 1918, dealt with male nudes in an erotic "Turkish Bath" water-color. Hartley was less documentary and witty than Demuth in his steambath nudes, showing them heroically well-proportioned and stationary. But their emphatic musculature, nipples, and genitals made their erotic power inescapable — and so embarrassing to most historians that, as William Gerdtis has written, the males nudes are "perhaps the least studied aspect of Hartley's art."

There were other male portraits as well, as if Hartley was finally free to face a non-abstracting portraiture — a "young hunter," a "sea-dog," and others — all large, archaic, and very tender. Some of the late drawings of Maine fishermen astonishingly offer all-male priests and holy families. A Raoul-like "Three Friends" offers a naked risen Christ with a prize fighter on his right and down on his left. (Hartley had long been fascinated with clowns, acrobats, and other circus figures, had even written a group of six sayings on the subject. Elop-harts and Rhinestones, with epigraphs from Havelock Ellis such as: "Everything is serious, and at the same time frivolous.") One painting, called "Fantasy" or "Adelard Ascending," blends a memory of Adelard the drowned with the ascension in a rather grotesque way.

Although Hartley's humor and imagination manifested his homoeroticism by these various means, the most stunning paintings are generally the late portraits of dead seagulls or other sea creatures: simplified, powerful, lonely, but with a dramatic sense of community in loneliness, of a shared world at the fringe. I take this to be Hartley's strongest gay testament: community at the fringe, fellowship along the deserted coast. It's one he best articulated in "Gay World," a late poem that anticipates Frank O'Hara and demonstrates (to quote Ginsberg again) Hartley's "naïveté which charms and teaches all us smartalecks, by returning literature to its norm."

It is, finally, a gay world; the more so for us because Marsden Hartley lived, wrote, and painted it in. □

Direct quotations from Marsden Hartley in this article come from one of the following publications:

- Robert Burlingame, **Marsden Hartley: A Study of His Life and Creative Achievement**, Dissertation (Brown University), 1954.
- Alexander Eliot, **Three Hundred Years of American Painting**, 1957.
- Donald Gallup, "Weaving of a Pattern," Marsden Hartley and Gertrude Stein, **Magazine of Art**, November 1948.
- Marsden Hartley, **Selected Poems**, New York, 1945.
- Museum of Modern Art, **Lionel Feininger and Marsden Hartley**, New York Reprint Edition, 1966.

For the complete annotation for this article, write to Michael Lynch in care of **The Body Politic**

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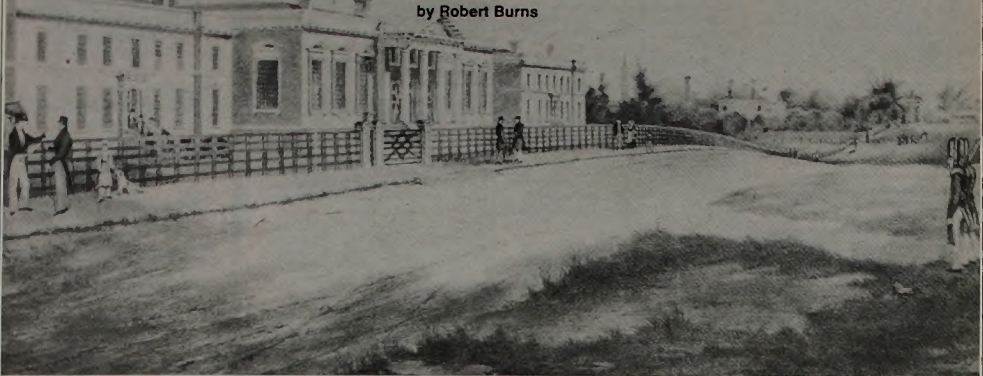
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# Queer doings'

Attitudes towards homosexuality  
in 19th century Canada

by Robert Burns



credit: Metropolitan Toronto Library Board

In the summer of 1838, just months after William Lyon Mackenzie had led his farmer 'troops' down Yonge Street in their abortive attempt to capture Toronto, a series of extraordinary events occurred in the city of Toronto, culminating in the resignation of the Inspector General of Upper Canada, George Herchmer Markland. On the second of August, Markland appeared before the Executive Council to answer charges that his habits were 'derogatory to his character as public officer.' He was accused of having had illicit sexual liaisons with a number of young men. After five days of testimony in which nine witnesses were heard, the inquiry proceedings ceased abruptly; three weeks later, the Inspector General suddenly resigned his post and left the city soon after. Markland died in obscurity in Kingston twenty-four years later, an obscurity so total that his burial place cannot be located. No known portrait of the man remains.

The case is important because it presents the only documentary evidence, to this writer's knowledge, concerning society's attitudes toward homosexuality in early nineteenth century Canada. It provides in effect a window on the past, though not a perfectly clear one. There was, for example, no newspaper coverage of the inquiry — understandable in that Executive Council sessions were not public affairs. But there were also no newspaper references save a brief and unexplained notice of Markland's resignation, though it was common knowledge to many in the small city that an inquiry was being held. Had it not been for the preservation of the public archives in Ottawa of over 100 pages of inquiry transcripts and correspondence, Markland's sudden departure from public life would have remained a mystery.

George Herchmer Markland was born about 1790 in Kingston, Upper Canada, the son of a prosperous merchant, and was educated, along with many other scions of what would come to be known as the 'Family Compact', by John Strachan at Cornwall. In 1810 Markland was described as 'a good, indeed an excellent young man' who wished to enter the Anglican ministry. In the same year the future attorney general and chief justice of Upper Canada, John

Beverly Robinson, described Markland, then 20 years old, as 'a good fellow, and very friendly,' but added: 'I prefer seeing a person at his age rather more manly and not quite so feminine [italics not mine] either in speech or action.' Markland did not enter the ministry. During the War of 1812 he served as an ensign in a company of Frontenac militia commanded by his uncle, Lawrence Herchmer.

In 1820 Markland unsuccessfully contested the assembly riding of Kingston against fellow Tory, Christopher Alexander Hageman. Within a few weeks of his defeat he was appointed to the Legislative Council, probably through the influence of Strachan. Two years later, at age 32, he was made an honorary member of the Executive Council and, in 1827, a regular member. He was also appointed to the Provincial Board of Education in 1822. Though Markland spent several years in England in the mid-1820's, his absence from Upper Canada did not slow his advancement in the government. In 1828 he was appointed secretary receiver of the Upper Canada Clergy Corporation which administered the leasing of the clergy reserves. In the same year he became registrar of King's College, chartered in 1827, and was later involved with Lieutenant Governor Sir John Colborne in the creation of Upper Canada College. From 1831 to 1838 he was also secretary and treasurer of the board responsible for the collection of money from the sale of school lands, and from 1828 to 1836 he served as an arbitrator in the division of customs revenue between Upper and Lower Canada. In his positions of trust and in his roles as legislative and executive councillor Markland completely supported Strachan's religious and educational goals. In 1836, for example, he, Peter Robinson, and Joseph Wells formed the Executive Council which assented to Colborne's endorsement of 43 Anglican rectories. In May 1838 he reached the apex of his career when he was made inspector general of public accounts. As in his previous positions of fiscal responsibility, he worked diligently and efficiently; he was, to all appearances, a model bureaucrat deserving the emulation of his fellow officials.

## Markland under suspicion

The first hint that the 43 year old Markland's world was about to crumble around him came in May 1838 in the form of a letter from Margaret Powell, housekeeper to the west wing of the

government building where his office was located. She noted in part: 'Your Movements about this Building in the Evenings are watched, and have become the Subject of conjecture.' Markland responded immediately: 'as to any persons watching my movements they are at liberty to do so, but will save themselves much trouble by coming upstairs at any time. They will generally find me alone, perhaps occasionally with a young man of the band whose friends have deposited with me an allowance which he sometimes gets himself and sometimes sends for when he cannot come.' Markland had given a seemingly reasonable explanation of his conduct but the rumours did not cease, and soon he was to regret his offhanded admission that he did indeed meet young soldiers in the evenings at his office. In mid-June Markland wrote to Lieutenant Governor Sir George Arthur concerning the rumours and requested that his old teacher and patron, Archdeacon John Strachan, be asked to form a one-man inquiry into the matter. Arthur's secretary John Macaulay immediately responded that his excellency 'while he deeply laments the occurrence which has led to this application, it does not appear to him that an investigation conducted in the manner which you propose would be likely to produce a satisfactory result.' Macaulay added: 'It is therefore in the

opinion of His Excellency advisable that an inquiry should immediately be instituted by the Honourable the Executive Council into the truth of all the allegations connected with the case, and have commanded to assure you that it will afford the most sincere pleasure to His Excellency to learn that upon due examination, your character is relieved from all imputations now unhappily cast upon it.'

On July third the lieutenant governor himself received an anonymous letter stating that 'an everlasting stigma of disgrace' would fall upon the present government wera 'the present incumbent of the office of the Inspector General ... suffered to remain in office.' The writer added that Arthur's predecessor, Sir Francis Bond Head, would never have knowingly tolerated such a situation and firmly threatened that he would 'direct a note to the Parliament soon.'

With the lieutenant governor determined upon an inquiry Markland next asked for time to summon witnesses from distant points in his defence. The

## The Cast of Characters

**The accused:**  
George Markland — Inspector General of Upper Canada.

**The officials:**  
Sir George Arthur — Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada (1838-1841). His predecessors were: Sir Francis Bond Head (1836-1838), and Sir John Colborne (1828-1836).  
John Macaulay — secretary to Lieutenant Governor Sir George Arthur.  
Archdeacon John Strachan — influential member of the 'Family Compact', and friend, patron and old teacher of George Markland.  
R. B. Sullivan — member of the Executive Council and confidant of the Lieutenant Governor.

**The witnesses:**  
Margaret Powell — housekeeper at the Parliament Buildings.  
Hannah Pike — Mrs. Powell's servant at the Buildings.  
Private John Brown — soldier in the Queen's Rangers and cousin of Hannah Pike.

Richard Hull Thornhill — first clerk in Crown Land's Office, probably friend of Markland.  
James Pearson — a fifer in the band of the 24th Regiment of foot.  
William Morrow — a friend of Markland who acted as letter carrier and messenger between Markland and James Pearson in Montreal.  
Frederick Craig Mittlebeury — a young law student who had once been a frequent visitor to Markland's home and who had been financially supported by him.  
Henry Hughes — an 18-year-old laborer serving in Archdeacon Strachan's household who had been befriended by Markland.  
Henry Stewart — a Toronto merchant whose younger brother had allegedly had sexual advances made to him by Markland three years before.

**Also mentioned:**  
Richard Monaghan — e clarinetist in the band of the 24th Regiment of foot.  
Sergeant Jones — a soldier friend of James Pearson and an apparent intermediary with Markland.

Robert Burns, now an historian with the federal government, first became interested in George Markland while working for the Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

time was granted though apparently grudgingly. Arthur directed his secretary "to state that as the matter has unfortunately become generally known, no unnecessary delay should be allowed to take place in bringing it to an issue." During the next month correspondence passed between Markland and the lieutenant governor's secretary. Markland continually related his difficulties in bringing witnesses to Toronto, or had them on hand just as Arthur was departing to another part of the Province.

Finally on the first of August Archdeacon Strachan received a note from Secretary Macaulay "to acquaint you that the inquiry into the case of the Honorable Mr. Markland will be proceeded with tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock, at the Executive Council Chamber, when His Excellency will permit the attendance of yourself and of any of the other friends of that Gentleman who may desire to be present on the occasion." On the same day Markland wrote Macaulay stating that his witness "a young man of the 24th Regiment" lives in town and requesting that his affidavit might be taken by the mayor rather than before the Executive Council. Arthur refused the request. Markland also wrote a memorial to Arthur stressing how he, and his father before him, had striven for half a century to uphold the institutions of the country, and how he had worked for almost twenty years on the Legislative Council and nine years on the Executive Council to further those ends. He added: "It would seem that I am suspected of what I declare myself wholly incapable of even imagining, and I unhesitatingly assert my innocence, which I can prove, I can show, for ample testimony, that mine were acts of beneficence, not of wrong, that from an early period of my life, such acts have produced good, not evil." Markland stressed that he had quietly and privately helped a number of young people, "I can prove that the high and the humble have been equally objects of my beneficence, and that the occasion which has unhappily brought about all this anxiety was one equally just." Markland maintained, probably quite rightly, that entire condemnation must follow any manifestation of Your Excellency's dissatisfaction. The Public will make no distinction, and I throw myself fearlessly upon the justice of Your Excellency to prevent an indelible stain from being fixed upon a family that has so long been valued for its public zeal and for its private worth." Markland concluded his plea: "I have dared, with the most profound respect, to entreat Your Excellency that such ruin, as must ensue, may be averted, and trusting to Your Excellency's Justice and Kindness. . . . Markland's final effort to forestall the inquiry came to naught. Whether by accident or design Arthur did not acknowledge receipt of the memorial until three o'clock on August second, five hours after the inquiry had begun.

## Was there a female in the room?

The first witness, appropriately enough, was Margaret Powell who, it turned out, had written not only the memorial, but also a member of the Executive Council, Robert Baldwin Sullivan. It was Sullivan who informed Lieutenant Governor Arthur, presumably before the anonymous letter arrived. Mrs. Powell testified that beginning in the late winter Markland had begun concerning the parties, but from seeing them meet outside, afterwards separate and come separately into the House it appeared to me that an intimacy subsisted between them which I thought extraordinary considering the relative rank of the parties. . . . On three occasions according to Mrs. Powell "a

**'Well, Sir, these are queer doings from the bottom to the top.'**

**Margaret Powell**

person in the uniform of the Band, in a white coat, came with the drummer." Finally, after this behaviour had been noted by both her servant and her young son, her curiosity got the better of her. On "the evening of the 23rd May about a quarter after 7 o'clock I wished to speak to Mr. Markland about the fence round the grounds which I was anxious should be repaired so as to keep out the cattle. I first went to the door of the office in which Mr. Nation, Markland's clerk, writes and found it locked on the inside. I then went to the other door which I also found locked on the inside. I heard voices inside. . . . Mr. Markland was one of the persons speaking. They spoke so low that I could not distinguish a word. I could only hear the murmur of the voices. I then heard such movements as convinced me that there was a female in the room, with whom some person was in connection. I remained there seven or eight minutes. No doubt remains upon my mind as to the nature of the noise I heard, and I was sure a female was in the room." Mrs. Powell then walked downstairs but it was the drummer, not a woman, who passed her "in great haste" fifteen minutes later; she did admit that she could not swear it had not been "a female in disguise."

Hughes came several times in the month of May." Hughes was to testify later on his own account. Hannah Pike also introduced the name of a cousin of hers, John Brown, who had related to her a peculiar tale concerning Markland. Brown was to be the next witness. Mrs. Powell's servant concluded her testimony by saying she had recently "seen a drummer in Town in the uniform of the 24th Regiment in the company of two men of Mr. Markland. He is not the person who called the drummer. I never saw the person which I saw this morning visit Mr. Markland." Markland's reason for not wanting his witness from Montreal to testify before the Executive Council must now have been becoming obvious to its members. Private John Brown of the Queen's Rangers described his encounters with Markland thus: "one evening in the month of February [sic] . . . I met a man in the Yard. He had a cloak on, and I afterwards ascertained that he is Mr. Markland. On this occasion he laid his hand on my arm as if he knew me, and leaned on my arm. I perceived that he looked like a gentleman. And I did not understand his behaviour. I put my other hand upon my bayonet and kept it there. He walked with me leaning on my arm from the Parliament House up to the street turning up to Government House [to inform me that a distance of about one block]. Brown went on to describe another encounter a night or two later." Mr. Markland met me again. He then laid his hand upon my left

**"I also observed something extraordinary in his manner of taking my hand and keeping it in his own for several minutes when I would allow him. . . . On one occasion I was dining with Mr. Markland alone when I was much ashamed at Mr. Markland making the following observation: 'you have the most perfect figure of any one in town. Several people have remarked it.'"**

**Frederick Muttelbury**

she had not actually seen anything of the kind I recommended to Mrs. Powell to state to that effect and that any reports she had originated were founded merely on suspicion." Thornhill tried to explain to Mrs. Powell that "all the facts stated by her did not amount to positive proof of Mr. Markland's criminality and would not be considered as doing so in a Court of Justice." It must be remembered that the Executive Council could inquire into virtually any aspect of government, such as the behaviour of its members, but it was not by any means a court of justice, nor did it in theory function as one. It was Thornhill's opinion that Mrs. Powell "appeared much distressed at the prospect of an investigation & she seemed to wish the matter at an end,



Archdeacon (later Bishop) John Strachan, the most powerful member of the ruling elite of Upper Canada known as the "Family Compact," was a friend and former teacher of George Markland. Several times throughout Markland's career, Strachan tried to use his influence to extricate Markland from difficulties. Do we know all there is to know about Bishop Strachan?



Lieutenant Governor Sir George Arthur, recently-appointed head of the colonial administration in Upper Canada, in 1838 conducted the executive inquiry into George Markland's behaviour.

Immediately afterwards Markland came down the stairs, also "in great haste," and Mrs. Powell spoke to him: "I wished him to see that I observed him." She added: "I made the following observation which I am sure Mr. Markland will remember. 'Well Sir these are queer doings from the bottom to the top.'"

Mrs. Powell also testified that when prior to May twenty-third, she mentioned Markland's peculiar evening office visits to R.B. Sullivan he "made . . . light of it and said it was all nonsense." It was not until Sullivan saw Markland's reply to Mrs. Powell's warning letter that he decided any action was necessary. He first spoke to John Strachan as a friend of Markland, and then, finding that rumours were spreading around the city, left it his duty to report the situation to the lieutenant governor. Exactly how the rumours spread, or whether they were but the rekindling of earlier stories about Markland, will probably never be known. However, it does seem that it was not so much Mrs. Powell's charges themselves as the evidence in Markland's own handwriting that he had had young male visitors at his office that set the inquiry into motion.

The inquiry's second witness, Hannah Pike, was Mrs. Powell's servant and helped with chores in the parliament building. She corroborated much of the evidence of her mistress concerning Markland's evening visitors, including the point that he locked his office doors during such visits, and added another dimension to the charges. She mentioned that "a young man who used to live with Dr. Strachan named Henry

shoulder and walked with [it] in that position. He talked about where I came from, what regiment I belonged to, whether I would like to face [William Lyon] Mackenzie & other questions of an indifferent nature. He walked with me down to the turn of York Street and I went home to my quarters at the Lawyers Hall [Osageo Hall where some soldiers were quartered briefly following the Rebellion]." Brown gave as his opinion that he "thought Mr. Markland must have been out of his mind from the familiar manner of his walks with me and leaning on my arm. . . . However, Brown was quick to add that Markland "never made use of improper language in my company." With Brown's statement completed the Executive Council adjourned for the day presumably to mull over the statements they had heard.

The first witness on the next day Friday August third, was a young member of Toronto's government clique, Richard Hull Thornhill, first clerk in the Crown Lands Office. Thornhill stated that he had been asked by Markland to speak to Mrs. Powell, probably following her letter to the inspector general. At Markland's request Thornhill had "called upon Mrs. Powell and stated to her that if she would note to Dr. Strachan that she knew nothing against Mr. Markland further than her report, the matter might so end, otherwise that Mr. Markland would be obliged to proceed with an investigation. I asked Mrs. Powell if she had actually seen anything criminal in Mr. Markland's conduct, and understanding from her that

but she would not make any statement other than a detail of the facts at first alleged." Thornhill also stated that he knew Mrs. Powell quite well and could not see what would motivate her to make a false accusation.

## The boys in the band

The only other witness called before the Executive Council that Friday was the young soldier whom Markland had summoned from Montreal, James Pearson, a fifer in the band of the 24th Regiment of foot. Markland had obviously intended that Pearson's testimony completely refute the charges made by Mrs. Powell, but the young soldier, while sympathetic to Markland's plight, had no desire to share the opprobrium directed at the inspector general. Pearson stated that the first he heard of Markland from a Sergeant Jones who "had mentioned to me that Mr. Markland had expressed his willingness to purchase my discharge [from the army]. He said that Mr. Markland had noticed me walking with him Sergeant Jones one Sunday evening. I remember seeing Mr. Markland, in the Sunday evening alluded to and I was then in company with Sergeant Jones and Sergeant Jones told me that Mr. Markland was the person who purchased Sewell's discharge [he belonged to the 15th Regiment]." When Markland and Pearson first met a little later Markland mentioned the purchase and I told [him] that I was desirous to leave the regiment and go back to my family which was at Kingston. . . . After this conversation Mr. Markland said that he would see me perhaps some other time

# Our Image

and let me hear more about it."

Pearson in describing later meetings stated: "I used to see him on the evenings when I was coming down from the Garrison [west of the city]. One evening we walked together on the wharf for 15 or 20 minutes. I cannot say whether or not Mr. Markland took my arm." At this meeting Markland told Pearson "that it had any thing particular to say to him I might come down to his office. . . . He gave me good advice and . . . told me of several young men whose discharges he had purchased. He told me I was to come to the back of the building and in the evening." Several evenings later, according to Pearson, he met Markland at the rear of the parliament building and spoke for 15 minutes in his office during which "we had some conversation relating to my leaving the regiment." At Markland's invitation he visited again several evenings later but could not remember if Markland had locked the doors. Pearson visited "frequently" after this but never stayed "longer than 15 minutes" and "never came into the building with any other person than Mr. Markland." Pearson could not recall if he had been at Markland's office on the evening of the 23rd of May when Mrs. Powell alleged to have heard "noises." Nor did he ever see the inspector "with any other of the band or the soldiers of the regiment."

While much of Pearson's testimony was ambivalent, some of it proved harmful to Markland's case. Pearson stated that Markland "never received any money for me and he never gave me any," a direct contradiction of Markland's letter to Mrs. Powell. Pearson also introduced a new figure "a young man named Monaghan of the Band" for whom Markland had also offered to purchase his discharge. Pearson denied ever knowing if Monaghan had visited Markland at his office. Pearson described Monaghan as "younger than me, he plays a clarinet in the Band. Monaghan has light brown hair. He always wore a white coat — the uniform of the Band." In the final part of his testimony Pearson stated that while stationed at Bytown (Ottawa) he had received from the hands of Mr. Morrow a letter from Markland "containing good advice to me and renewing his promises and telling me to take care of myself." While Morrow was in Bytown a second letter arrived from the inspector general asking that the first one be returned. Pearson testified that he gave the letter to Morrow "to take back to Markland and that he received only one further letter from Markland, requesting him to come to Toronto to testify. Pearson ended his testimony by declaring that he no longer had any of Markland's letters. R. B. Sullivan of the Executive Council immediately after adjournment wrote to Markland: "The Council desire to see, if you have no objection, a letter from you to James Pearson, which appears to have been returned. Also any other Correspondence with him which you have in your possession, particularly the Answer to the above Letter." There is no record of a reply from Markland.

The first witness called on Saturday was the bearer of the mysterious letter from Markland to Pearson, William Morrow. His version of the exchange of letters differed from that of Pearson. According to Morrow he had been asked by Markland to see Pearson for the specific purpose of returning to Markland a letter then in Pearson's possession. Sergeant Jones, through whom Pearson met Markland, appears again in the testimony, at first Morrow denied having delivered a letter from Markland to the sergeant, but then abruptly admitted having done so stating: "My recollection was confused when I made the first statement." The significance of the role of Jones remains unclear as does the importance of whether Morrow had seen Pearson or the original Markland letter or a second one asking for its return. The question, at any rate, was sufficiently important for

Pearson to be called again to testify briefly. The young bandsman once more swore that it was the original letter which Morrow delivered, not one asking for its return. In the original letter from Markland contained material which reflected upon the inspector general's sexual preferences. Pearson would of course have wished to indicate that he returned it immediately. Possibly Morrow, as a friend and confidant of Pearson, had hoped that the Executive Council's suspicions regarding the letter's contents by testifying that Pearson had had the letter for some time and had not felt its contents warranted its immediate return. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that either Pearson or Morrow was lying under oath.

## 'The most perfect figure in town'

The last witness of the day was Frederick Creighton Muttiebury who explained how he had first met Markland. He was then an eighteen year old about to proceed to Quebec to become a clerk in a mercantile firm. Markland convinced him to study law at Toronto and offered to advance him the money he would require. Muttiebury accepted and soon was boarding outside the city, but at Markland's expense. The young law student stated that he never boarded with Markland, but did dine with him "about three times a week." This situation lasted for about a year during the course of which

Toronto in 1838 had a population of only 12,500, and would have been the kind of place where rumours spread uncommonly fast and anonymity was virtually impossible. Incorporated as the first city in Upper Canada only four years before, Toronto was the first seat of the colonial government and a centre of mercantile activity. Visitors varied in their opinions. Mrs. Anne Jameson, an Englishwoman who wrote about an unhappy stay in Upper Canada, called Toronto, "most strongly mean and melancholy. A little, but built upon some government offices, built of sterner red brick. In the most tasteless, vulgar style imaginable. . . . Charles Dickens, on the other hand, thought the town "full of life and motion, bustle, business, and improvement." He added, however, "the wild and rabid Toryism of Toronto is, I speak seriously, appalling."

Muttiebury "observed Mr. Markland's manner towards me gradually changing; I felt he looked upon me in a kind of smirking way it did not like. . . . I also observed something extraordinary in his manner of taking my hand and keeping it in his own for several minutes when I would allow him. The first time he took my hand in this manner was in the street, when he held it for some time. I did not like it but noticed the same thing on other occasions. On one occasion I was dining with Mr. Markland alone when I was much ashamed at Mr. Markland making the following observation: "You have the most perfect figure of any one I know. Several people have remarked it." These developments, coupled with the contents of letters from Markland to Muttiebury (letters not described nor now in existence but then shown to the Executive Council) determined Muttiebury to break off his relationship with the inspector general. Muttiebury stated quite emphatically that at the time he did not suspect Markland of "criminal intentions." "I had scarcely any conception at the time of the possibility of a crime of the nature which afterwards suggested itself to me" was the way in which the agile law student exculpated himself from any possible tinge of mutual guilt. But the most extraordinary aspect of Muttiebury's testimony was the calm statement that he had shown the letters from Markland to the then lieutenant governor, Sir John Colborne. Colborne had asked Muttiebury why he had broken off with Markland and why Muttiebury had left the letters at Government

**Sir:**  
Can it be possible that the Government will continue to retain in office a man with such an indelible stain upon his character as the Honourable!! George H. Markland!...  
What an everlasting stigma and disgrace it will be upon the Government of this province...

Toronto

House at his request. According to Muttiebury, Colborne spoke to him of the matter "frequently. . . . he recommended me to keep the letters, but not show them and on the day before he left this place he told me that he would take an opportunity of informing the Chief Justice [John Beverley Robinson] of the whole transaction and he recommended my Mother to call upon Mr. [William] Allan [a member of the Executive Council and Toronto's most wealthy merchant-entrepreneur] and to show him the letters, which I afterwards understood she accordingly did." Muttiebury testified that Colborne made no comment regarding the letters other than agreeing he had been correct and that the relationship, nor did Muttiebury know if Markland had ever tried to explain his conduct. Muttiebury's final comment was that Markland "never attempted or proposed in the remotest

conduct." Margaret Powell returned next to testify that James Pearson "is not the person who I have in my examination stated to have been in Mr. Markland's office on the evening of the 23rd May. The man I saw with Mr. Markland was about as tall as Pearson but much stouter. He wore the same uniform; he wore a sword. His hair was very light — as light as hair ever is naturally. He had very light eyebrows, and not a pleasant expression of countenance." She stated that she had never seen Pearson with Markland at all. Hannah Pike gave essentially the same evidence and added that she had obtained the name James Pearson from another member of the 24th Regiment by describing the young man she had seen on the twenty-third of May. She gave this as her only reason for saying that the individual was in fact James Pearson. As the Executive Council adjourned for the day its members must have realized that Markland had known Pearson was not the man whom Mrs. Powell and Hannah Pike claimed to have seen. It is the only logical explanation for his effort to keep Pearson from appearing at the enquiry. During the day's testimony R. B. Sullivan wrote Markland asking "if you think it right to state whether or not a person belonging to the 24th Regiment of very light complexion and light hair was in the habit of visiting you — whether he was at your office on the evening of the 23rd May last, and if so, what was his name, and



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manner anything improper or criminal to me, and added to protect himself: "It he had done so, I should not have contented myself with withdrawing from his acquaintance and protection." So ended Saturday's testimony. On Sunday John Macaulay, Arthur's secretary but not a member of the Executive Council, wrote privately to his wife: "The investigation of Mr. Markland's case is now going on. It is rumored that he cannot succeed in clearing the matter up. . . ."

On Monday August sixth the inquiry continued with the testimony of Henry Hughes, an eighteen year old labourer who had served in John Strachan's household for three years. Hughes had come to know Markland when, as a schoolboy, he passed the inspector general's home "three or four times a day" and afterwards "when I went to his home on messages from the Archdeacon." Hughes testified that "Mr. Markland used to ask me when he met me going to & returning from school what my intentions were, as to my future trade, and he recommended me to adopt that of a carpenter in preference to the Engineering business [probably laboring]. I have been about twice at Mr. Markland's office at 7 o'clock in the evening. . . . One time I came in at the front door and another time at the back door." Hughes admitted: "it did appear strange to me to be asked to Mr. Markland's office; no body else treated me so," but added that Markland's "conversation always was relating to my affairs. . . . [He] never said or proposed any thing improper to me, and he gave me good advice as to my

whether you would desire to have his attendance in Toronto, for the purpose of answering the circumstances alleged against you." Though his reply has not been preserved Markland apparently mentioned a William Monaghan as possibly fitting the description for Sullivan wrote again the same day. He and the council desired further information concerning Monaghan's physical appearance "and whether any other or what persons answering the description of a person in the uniform of a drummer or bugler of the 24th Regiment was in the habit of visiting you or of coming to your office." Sullivan ended with the words: "The Executive Council do not appear to press these questions upon you. They are asked with a view of obtaining satisfactory explanations of the facts alleged, but the information is such as may or may not come from you at your discretion." There is no record of Markland's reply.

The only witness called on Tuesday, August seventh, and the last of whose testimony is available, was a Toronto merchant, Henry Stewart, who described an incident which had occurred about 1835 between his brother John Stewart (in 1838 a merchant at Paris, Upper Canada) and Markland. Henry Stewart testified that he "understood from my brother that Mr. Markland sometimes walked with him and showed great interest in his welfare and made very kind enquiries concerning his future prospects. . . . One evening, however, according to Henry Stewart, John told him that he had "met Mr. Markland, who asked him to walk with

him, that they had walked up towards the Garrison in the dusk of evening, that Mr. Markland had leaned upon his shoulder and had put his hand in an indecent manner on my brother's person, and that he (my brother) immediately kicked Mr. Markland in the body and ran away." The Executive Council ordered that John Stewart be requested to appear "with as little delay as possible." He apparently did come to Toronto for the travel expenses of £4.12.0 are listed in the council minutes some months later, but his testimony, if it was given, has not been preserved.

## Resignation, disgrace, obscurity

On August 23, his career in shambles, Markland wrote to Arthur's secretary stating that he was "desirous of resigning... for reasons connected with my own private affairs which would be benefited by my residence in the vicinity of Kingston." Markland also asked for a leave of absence until November first. Arthur's scribbled comment on the letter was to "inform Mr. M. in reply that it has been notified to me that the Proceeding [which] were instituted before the [Executive] Council were stayed in consequence of his intimation to retire from the office of Inspector General" — that leave will be granted to him until the 1st October on which day his retirement will be notified." Markland returned to Kingston to live in virtual isolation. In the following month, after being pressed by

**"I heard voices inside... I then heard such movements as convinced me that there was a female in the room, with whom some person was in connection."**

Margaret Powell

friends and associates. The passing of his peers in the Family Compact elicited glowing eulogies from reform and conservative newspapers alike, but Markland's death was noted in the *Toronto Globe* by identical two-line obituaries. This writer has not even been able to discover Markland's final resting place. If his contemporaries attempted to bury and forget Markland, his career, and its eclipse, they were almost completely successful.

But if little can be said with certainty about Markland as an individual, it is possible to speculate upon the views of his fellows toward homosexuality. On first glance the Markland case would seem to indicate that there was no clandestine homosexual community or group in Toronto in the 1830s. Only a single lonely individual bumping from one unhappy encounter to another. Yet it must be remembered that Markland was about 48 years of age in 1838 and, if the circumstantial evidence is accurate, had very particular sexual preferences — preferences which by their very nature could not be met by any one

group if little need be said. Mrs. Powell claimed to have no ill will toward Markland; she simply felt it her duty to society to expose what she understood as his behaviour. The motivation of the witnesses sympathetic to Markland was somewhat more complex. Time and again they offered bills of testimony which could be construed as incriminating but always stressed that Markland never proposed anything improper to them as individuals. Each was torn between the desire to support Markland's claim of innocence, and the overwhelming spectre of being associated with Markland if he were found "guilty." Only Henry Hughes, the servant of John Strachan, unreservedly supported Markland's plea. The rest made certain that if Markland fell, they would not go with him; at worst they would be viewed as having been naive, and used by the inspector general. The fear of the sympathetic witnesses is almost tangible and it gives one some indication of the severity of the stigma attached to homosexuality in Toronto in the 1830s.

The attitudes of other public figures toward Markland in particular and toward homosexuality in general are somewhat more difficult to assess. If, as Muttibury testified, definite evidence of Markland's sexual proclivities was available in 1836, why did the inquiry not occur until 1837? Arthur appears to have pressed Markland relentlessly, refusing his ever-increasing requests to avoid the inquiry. It could be argued that as a career officer in the British Army Arthur had a special reason for wanting to end the type of conduct of which Markland stood accused. Yet Sir John Colborne was more the professional soldier than Arthur, serving as he did throughout the Napoleonic Wars and even commanding a regiment at Waterloo. It is possible that Markland was in fact sacrificed in the aftermath of the Rebellion by a lieutenant governor desirous of showing the populace that the British government was as capable of punishing Tories as it had been of suppressing Rebels. The question remains as to why no official action was taken against Markland in 1836. It could simply be that the letters to Muttibury did not constitute sufficient evidence to warrant action.

The reactions of some who saw the letters seem to make this unlikely. It is possible also that as long as there were no widespread rumours of illicit activities, no punitive action would be taken. Colborne did counsel Muttibury to keep the letters — "for possible future use... but not to show them to anyone." Arthur also cited the rumours as the main reason for insisting on a speedy and complete inquiry. Even R. B. Sullivan tried to laugh off Mrs. Powell's accusations until he saw Markland's own letter admitting to having young male visitors at his office. It is the speculation of this writer that Upper Canada's high ranking government officers did not object to Markland's alleged homosexuality, but rather to its becoming publicly known. Put crudely, such activity was, if not countenanced, at least tacitly accepted unless done in the streets where it frightened the horses. If this speculation is accurate it indicates a somewhat more liberal attitude toward homosexuality on the part of Upper Canada's educated governing class. Considering the horror with which the inquiry witnesses viewed the accusation against Markland, his peers could ever so easily have exhibited some mercy. Markland, after all, was not turned over to the criminal courts for prosecution of a felony as, it appears, he could well have been. Instead the inquiry was simply halted in return for his resignation, and he was allowed to retire in some degree of disgrace. The facts, as they are known today, are too few to allow one to do more than speculate on possible motivations and attitudes. □



## Some further comments:

1. **Sodomy laws.** George Markland, and anyone incriminated along with him, would have been in serious trouble if the case had proceeded to the courts. In 1838 the statutes of the Imperial (British) Parliament had jurisdiction in Upper Canada. The penalty for sodomy/buggery at the time was death.
2. **The Homosexual as scapegoat.** The atmosphere in Toronto in the summer of 1838 must have been extremely tense. A rebellion had been quashed, although guerrilla-type activity was still going on in other parts of the province. Two of the rebels had been publicly hanged in Toronto only three months before Lieutenant Governor Sir Francis Bond Head had been replaced by Sir Arthur because he had been unable to deal effectively with the discontent. Arthur had to show some willingness to deal with complaints in order to defuse a hostile situation. The reformers would have been too closely watched to do anything but nip cautiously at Tory heels. The feeding of rumour mills and the writing of anonymous letters concerning the most vulnerable of the Family Compact (a man too careless or too arrogant to be discreet) would have been a logical tactic at this juncture.

Homosexuals throughout history have been sacrificed for political expediency by the creation of "sex scandals". These scandals have merely capitalized on an extensive culturally conditioned loathing of homosexual acts in order to discredit an individual, and conveniently in the process, a government, a party, a movement, a clique. It is a theme in gay history deserving greater exploration.

3. **Pre-psychiatric nomenclature.** For the first time we have some idea what homosexual acts were called in 19th-century Canada. The references by witnesses are consistently in terms of "crime" or "criminal conduct," or else a distasteful circumlocution ("an ugly look about it"). The concepts of sickness and perversion were to come later.

4. **Class differences.** Witnesses seemed as aghast at the example of a gentleman ("a man of his stature") fraternizing with boys from a lower class as they were by the sexual implications: "an intimacy extraordinary considering the relative rank of the parties." This points up the sharpness of class inequalities and the acute awareness of them at the time.

It was almost incomprehensible that a member of the upper class could be found a drummer boy. Was Markland also being tried implicitly for too blatantly crossing class boundaries? A greater awareness of the social and political context would seem to be crucial to a full understanding of the implications of the episode.

Ed Jackson



his fellow officers, he resigned his commission as a colonel in the Frontenac militia. He had resigned from the Executive Council in 1836 and was not re-appointed a legislative councillor in 1841. He never again held any public office.

Markland's problems did not end with his virtual banishment. In 1841 a legislative committee discovered that Markland as treasurer of the school lands fund was in default almost £5,000 for the period 1831-38. He did not deny responsibility for the deficit; the government was reimbursed through occasional payments and provisions in his will. The exact circumstances surrounding his defaultations from the school lands account remain unknown. He may have been guilty of no more than careless accounting, a common fault among nineteenth century Canadian officials. In the mid-1840s Markland barely escaped civil suit by the Council of King's College for his role in using college funds for the erection of Upper College. Strachan intervened on his behalf and convinced the council that Markland had merely been acting on the orders of Sir John Colborne.

George Herchmer Markland lived on in obscurity in Kingston until his death in 1862, 24 years after his resignation. Much of his life remains a mystery. He was, for example, married; there is an obituary of his wife in an 1847 newspaper. But it is not known who she was, whether they were married in 1838, or if there were any children. Today, only a few of Markland's letters remain, scattered in the correspondence of his

individual for any length of time. And 48 was considered much older in 1838 than it is today. In his testimony young James Pearson described one individual as "an elderly man and married. He is upwards of thirty." Markland's evening walks near the parliament building and the number of his encounters indicate to this student of human nature that perhaps the composition of society in 1838 differed little if any from that of today. Finally, one must consider the role of Sergeant Jones as an intermediary between Markland and Pearson and the other young soldiers, as well as the whole question of the purchasing of discharges from the army. If Markland was, as he claimed, merely the private patron who enjoyed helping others, then Sergeant Jones can be seen in the same light. It does, however, seem strange that a career soldier would actively work to deplete the forces under his command in a period of border raids out of a sense of philanthropy. If Markland was guilty as charged, then most probably the sergeant shared in that guilt. Garrisons were always considered an integral part of the social life of any nearby community; this social tie would be but another facet of the interrelationship.

## The severity of stigma: class differences

To examine the attitudes of the witnesses to homosexuality we must divide them into two groups according to their attitudes to Markland: antagonistic and sympathetic. Of the first

# Rainer Werner Fassbinder

by Thomas Waugh

The most important filmmaker in Europe right now, and possibly in the whole Western world, is a German, a radical, and a gay (not necessarily in that order, or in any order at all): Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Many gay activists apparently do not agree, judging from the lively debate that has appeared in the gay press about Fassbinder's 1975 'gay' film, *Fox and his Friends*. The debate has ranged in quality from intelligent analysis of the film's political and cultural context to emotional tirades of an astonishing ferocity.

I would like to explain why I think Fassbinder is so important.

Basically, it's a function of his potential rather than what he's actually accomplished, of his value as a model. Film scholars, are learning more and more these days about how the movies have always supported the structures of domination with every image and sound. As a result, a whole new generation of radical filmmakers are searching for a revolutionary film language that will challenge and counteract this traditional complicity. Unfortunately, most of these filmmakers have revolutionized themselves right out of an audience.

Fassbinder is one of the very few of these radicals who have kept themselves in contact with a wide popular audience. And in fact, in recent years he has expanded that contact.

If Fassbinder cannot come up with a model of a radical cinema that is truly popular (or a popular cinema that is truly radical) then perhaps no one can. In any case, I think that a radical popular cinema is what the director of *Fox and his Friends* seems to be on the verge of finding.

## II The Lumpen and the Piss elegant

By now, many readers of the gay press are familiar with the simple, almost one-dimensional parable that is the basis of the film. It is the story of a rather unattractive young carnival worker, Fox, whom we see in the first minutes of the film watching his lover get hauled off to jail, tricking with an elegant antique dealer with a Mercedes, and winning \$200,000 in a lottery. The trick introduces him to a circle of pretentious middle-class gays where he finds a lover, Eugen, and the love and attention he craves. But of course they love him for his money and his butch proletarian image, not for his money or the care he submits to exploitation and ultimate destruction at their hands with a combination of childish innocence and cynical masochism.

As far as losers go, Fox is not a particularly appealing one, and his victimizers are excessively vicious. All the same, Fassbinder orchestrates a pathos that is profound and direct. In fact, it is so direct that viewers expecting the so-called subtleties of bourgeois dramaturgy (as in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*) find it strangely repelling. The pathos is not a little enriched by the presence of Fassbinder himself in the role of Fox. His presence adds a personal dimension to this portrait of an archetypal victim and strengthens its passionate statement of despair.

Any film touching upon the subject of homosexuality is bound to be controversial — we've been denied the right of self-expression, the right to see ourselves on the screen for so long that we expect every gay film that comes along



'All: Fear Eats the Soul', 1973. Brigitte Mira and El Hedi Ben Salem as Jane Wyman and Rock Hudson. Fassbinder's masterpiece: love plus politics.



'All That Heaven Allows'. Douglas Sirk, 1955. Wealthy widow Jane Wyman and gardener Rock Hudson in a classical 'weepie'. Fassbinder works the story into *All 20* years later.

to make up for it all. Which, of course, is impossible. No film can meet such expectations.

And Fassbinder's refusal to be a spokesperson for the gay movement is undeniably frustrating. It's disappointing that the first post-Stonewall gay artist of major international stature should refuse to be our artist as emphatically as his pre-Stonewall predecessors: Forster, Genet, Williams, Pasolini, Visconti and the rest.

But Fassbinder's refusal to be type-cast as The Gay Filmmaker is adamant. Only five or six of the twenty-five odd films he has made (an impressive achievement for a filmmaker whose thirtieth birthday was this year) touch upon gay themes or include gay characters. And, although most exhibit a discernible homo-erotic or gay cultural sensibility, only two are set in a gay milieu.

This refusal must of course be respected. We must accept Fassbinder's lack of interest in those compact ideological statements which we often demand of our artists but rarely get, just as we must accept, for example, the rights of gays who choose to work within a political framework outside of the gay movement proper.

Certainly one of the tenets of gay liberation must be the importance, indeed the urgency, of speaking out on all contemporary issues, not simply those that affect us directly. I would like to show Fassbinder is in agreement with this way of looking at gay liberation, and has spoken out powerfully and passionately on the major issues confronting our society.

Fassbinder is not the first gay filmmaker who has seen the role of the

individual in modern society in terms of victimization and humiliation — both Pasolini and Lindsay Anderson have seen things the same way — but Fassbinder's images of victims who have internalized the oppression of the outside world are especially sharp. The interminable final sequence of *Fox* provides perhaps the bleakest of those images — the body of the suicide lying like a piece of cannon in the gleamingly sterile setting of a Munich subway station, plundered by kids and hurriedly bypassed by two of his friends. Yes, it's one more gay suicide, but I think that Fassbinder does it differently.

Fassbinder's most persuasive detractor from within the gay movement (Andrew Britton in the British journal, *Gay Left*, No. 3) has accused him of using the gay milieu in *Fox* as a metaphorical setting for his theme of exploitation within personal relationships. And of using gay relationships as an image of oppression in general, thus confirming negative gay stereotypes and seriously insulting us to boot. While Fassbinder is admittedly answerable for the effect of any one of his films, Britton's accusation must surely be qualified in the light of Fassbinder's many other films which deal with similar themes in other settings.

Fassbinder is certainly entitled to recreate in his work, the gay world as he knows it — that curious border zone within the gay community where the lumpen runs into the piss-elegant (a zone best explored on this side of the Atlantic by Warhol/Morrissey a few years ago). I don't go along with those who would prohibit gay artists from washing the gay community's dirty linen in public. There's already enough censorship in the

air.

But to return to Fassbinder, no doubt some of the misunderstanding of his work is due to the vagaries of the distribution system. Fassbinder's North American distributors have seriously distorted our sense of this prolific artist by concentrating on those two of his films which are set within a highly stylized gay milieu, *Fox* and *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, simply because their appeal to the gay community makes them highly saleable. *Fox* (not to mention *Petra* which is particularly liable to be misinterpreted) should not be anyone's first Fassbinder.

In fact, films as distinctive and innovative as Fassbinder's need to be sampled and nibbled at slowly while a relationship between artist and spectator is built up gradually. Fassbinder doesn't fit in very well to a movie culture based on instant gratification. To be sure, Fassbinder is answerable for that too, but that's another issue.

Another frequent charge against *Fox* is that it doesn't reflect the reality of the oppressive, homophobic society in which the gay ghetto is situated; it is true that the only explicit scene in this context comes from a scene where we are told that *Fox* and his lover have been kicked out of their apartment. And even here it is implied that there would be no problem if *Fox* were as respectable as his more finely feathered friends. But that implication is for me precisely the point that is being made.

Our society has certainly reached the stage where the privileged circles to which *Fox* is aspiring do not confront oppression in a palatable, recognizable form, but in the more subtle ways which are brilliantly outlined in the film. For example, in the impeccable "liberal" tolerance of Eugen's parents (they try very consciously to behave like model in-laws and are only offended by *Fox*'s table manners, not his gayness). Or in the exaggerated cultural pretensions and conspicuous consumption of the upper class gay ghetto, an actuality which we would be dishonest to deny. Here Fassbinder's observations are vivid and acute.

Andrew Britton angrily states that "there is no sense whatever that gayness and bourgeois ideology are in any way incompatible," because there is so little evidence of societal oppression of the gay community depicted in the film. Again I would say, that's precisely the point. Britton has no doubt discovered something I don't know about the incompatibility of gayness and bourgeois ideology, or perhaps he just



# er Fassbinder

doesn't read the *Advocate*. As far as I can see, the two seem to be getting along quite nicely, and Fassbinder is making this perception quite clear. For gay liberationists to pretend that class loyalties within the gay community are not stronger than the mystical bonds of gay brotherhood is simply tenuous and irresponsible. (Goodstein and the *Advocate* have demonstrated this dramatically.) It is clear that the gay activist community must extend its solidarity to all oppressed groups within society, and surely Fassbinder's films with their perspective of a whole range of specific social problematics, their sympathy with a whole range of society's outcasts, victims, and exploited classes, are an inspiring affirmation of this principle.

In any case, I find Fassbinder's criticism of the bourgeois gay milieu, his analysis of the dynamics of that milieu, to be extremely useful. As I've said, one of his targets is the ostentatious consumerism of Fox's new friends. The camera explores a range of settings, each one crammed with the commodities and artifacts of bourgeois existence than the next. One particularly dense reviewer in *Fag Rag* wondered how on earth anyone could like the atrociously tasteless collection of antiques that Fox's lover gathers for their new apartment. Once more, that's exactly the point. Fassbinder overdoes it beautifully.

When the scene moves to the baths, the same observation is extended from furniture, clothes, and cars, to the body and the genitals themselves. Fox meets his antique-dealer friend in the mud bath (do they really do it in the mud in Munich?) against a backdrop of strolling naked young lovelies, and carefully posed crotch shots — anonymous and almost disembodied. For me, the scene effects a stunning visualization of the ultimate degradation of the body, that objectification and consumerization of the body inherent in the *Advocate* lifestyle. The baths become one more environment packed with commodities, only here the commodities are youth, beauty, and genitals.

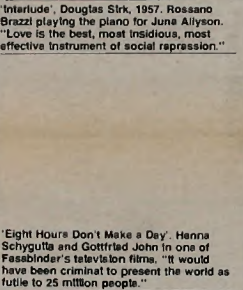
One more example. The scene where Fox gets himself picked up by the antique dealer at some roadside T-room, with blinking headlights and all (do they really use blinking headlights in Munich?) suggests another way we oppress one another. The almost ritualistic choreography of the cruise and the final moment of consent offers a deft analysis of the shifting role of power in such a transaction.

However I would argue that Fassbinder's look at this particular gay milieu is not only a case of airing dirty linen. I think he has another goal in mind as well, and it's hard to tell how successful it is in its immediate cultural context of Fassbinder's straight German public. Regarding the use of the gay setting, Fassbinder says with his customary ambiguity:

"I think it is incidental that the story happens among gays. It could have worked just as well in another milieu. But I rather think that people look back at it more carefully precisely because of its setting, because if it had been a 'normal love affair,' then the melodramatic aspect would have loomed much larger. I think that a moment comes when people stop noticing that they're watching gays, but then they're going to ask themselves: 'What have we just been watching?' We've seen a story that took place among people whom we consider unnatural." And through such bewilderment, through a moment of



"Interlude," Douglas Sirk, 1957. Rossano Brazzi playing the piano for June Allyson. "Love is the best, most insidious, most effective instrument of social repression."



"Eight Hours Don't Make a Day," Henna Schygulla and Gottfried John in one of Fassbinder's television films. "It would have been criminal to present the world as futile to 25 million people."

positive shock, the whole story also looks different. Elsewhere he explains further:

The idea that the film takes place among homosexuals is because the political aspects come out much clearer this way. When the social and political mechanisms are strong and working on an outsider group, then they work automatically on the so-called normal world.

In my opinion, the notion that a general audience will recognize those "social and political mechanisms" through a "moment of positive shock" is at least as plausible as the assumption that people will swallow the happy, wholesome, positive stereotypes we're supposed to want in the media. Certainly this is true of the relatively sophisticated urban audience that Fassbinder is likely to reach in the North American situation.

Anyway it's a notion that must be tested. If Fassbinder fails, the potential damage of a few extra negative stereotypes in a cultural environment already swamped with homophobia is inconsequential, and well worth the experiment.

### III "Weepies" and "Film noir" roots

"I am now convinced that even that love is the best, most insidious, most effective instrument of social repression.

Fassbinder wrote this statement of a theme explored in Fox (and most of his other films) after seeing a 1957 Hollywood "weepie" called *Interlude*. It is a story of a passing



romance between June Allyson and a European orchestra conductor played by Rossano Brazzi, from which Allyson emerges, as they say, sadder but wiser. *Interlude* was directed by Douglas Sirk, Universal Studio's master craftsman of "women's melodramas" or "weepies" during the fifties. Sirk is also a director who, as one of the more curious byproducts of cultural imperialism, has had more influence on Fassbinder than anyone else.

The presence of this cultural cross-fertilization in Fox and his *Friends* may not at first seem terribly important. If you think you've seen that brutally direct manipulation of pathos before, it's because you have — on the late, late show where Sirk's kind of "women's melodrama" is regular fare.

It's generally agreed now that Sirk was better than anyone else at rehashing those same old dramatic formulae which caused Joan Crawford and Bette Davis so much suffering over the years. It's also agreed now that Sirk used the melodrama formula to give Eisenhower America some of the most probing interrogations it ever got. A sense of Fox's roots in this tradition of the Hollywood "weepie" adds immeasurably to the effect of the film.

Most post-war European directors, Fassbinder included, have had their cultural contours shaped by Hollywood — the American domination of the European movie market made sure of that, (especially in West Germany, where, with the help of the U.S. occupation forces, the Hollywood monopolies were able to effectively stifle the birth of the West German cinema for an entire generation). After all, who could ever deal with Truffaut, Godard, or

Chabrol without reference to the Hollywood thrillers, gangster pictures, and yes, "weepies" which the Nouvelle Vague grew up on?

In any case, Fassbinder's theme of the oppressive potential of love was first taught to him by good old Universal Studios. The rest of his Hollywood inheritance is just as important. For example, those scenes of unbearable pathos in which people's illusions evaporate before their eyes, are part of that inheritance. The scene in *Interlude* of Life (1959), where Lana Turner listens incredulously while Sandra Dee tells her what a lousy mother she's been, is resuscitated innumerable times by Fassbinder. For example, when his aging heroine in *All: Fear Eats the Soul* tells her grown-up children that she's going to marry Ali, a young Moroccan labourer, she gets to watch her son kick in her television screen and her daughter founce out of "this piggery." Jane Wyman's monstrous children treat her exactly the same in *Sirk's All That Heaven Allows* when she makes a similar announcement about her gay partner. Fassbinder's *All: Fear Eats the Soul* also gave Fassbinder the archetype of the working-class hero(ine) who sleeps his or her way to the top because that's the only way to get there. There's also his baroque way of looking at things through railings and grills, through foreground frames of bouquets and lamps and mirrors, or using vertical elements of the set, bedposts or room-dividers, to literally divide two quarrelling figures from each other on the screen. It's right out of Sirk, naturally.

What it all means is that looking at Fox or *All* or *Petra* without reference to Sirk, and Hollywood in general, is a little like reading Eliot's *The Wasteland* without paying attention to the echoes of Dante, Wagner and Shakespeare, or listening to Bach's *B Minor Mass* without picking up on the old German hymn-tunes being reworked, or listening to Bob Dylan without reference to Woody Guthrie. It's possible, of course, but you're missing a lot.

Now, I'm not exactly a T.S. Eliot aficionado, and I would be the last person to endorse an artist who is content to address only that audience who knows Dante or Wagner — or Sirk for that matter — and I would be the first to assert the importance of the uninitiated response of the casual consumer in any art form. It is simply a question of recognizing that Fassbinder is building on a cultural heritage we all more or less have in common (thanks of course to the American monopoly on film distribution in Canada, etc.). And he's building a radical

# Our Image



**For gay liberationists to pretend that class loyalties within the gay community are not stronger than the mystical bonds of gay brotherhood is simply fatuous and irresponsible (Goodstein and The Advocate have demonstrated this dramatically).**

film practice on that heritage, reworking the old conventions to exploit their potential as analytical tools.

We've all been brought up for example, on those marvelous old films in which Joan Crawford or whoever had to sleep, slave, or marry her way to the top (or murder in the film noir variations of the genre). If we're thinking of *Sirk*, substitute Barbara Stanwyck, Lana Turner, or Dorothy Malone. Her progress up the ladder would usually be reflected along the way by the gradual refinement of the material trappings of her existence, by a proliferation of the most gaudy and expressive outfits, furniture, and cars that Hollywood designers could come up with. But finally she would discover that love and happiness are seldom at the top, only a different kind of loneliness (suffering, poverty) than at the bottom. And if such movies implicitly, timidly, and obliquely analysed American class structure and bourgeois values from within the bastion of capitalism itself, Fassbinder uses the same conventions to do the same, only far more directly. He refuses the gloss, the music, the chronic last-minute happy endings with which Hollywood would hurriedly cover over the gaping void it had exposed.

So, instead of returning Fox to his previous lover and his contented proletarian existence, as Hollywood might have done, Fassbinder forces him to the logical conclusion of suicide, and where Hollywood might have discreetly and compassionately draped the corpse, cut to an epilogue, or even rescued him at the last minute, Fassbinder forces you to watch his body in that desolate setting, long past the excruciating point where you have had enough. And if such insistence makes you angry, fidgety, and alienated, it is because Fassbinder refuses you the relief that bourgeois dramaturgy usually offers in cathartic endings. At that point you are likely to think about what you've seen, about the way we let our social conditioning dominate our expectations in a relationship, or use our love to dominate or possess or exploit. At least Fassbinder is hoping that's how you'll react.

A number of Feminists are discovering that the conventions of the women's melodrama are particularly useful in this direction. After all, most of the "weepies" ended up with the heroine making a sacrifice of some kind, of her love, her job, her children, her husband, etc. And so by using such conventions self-consciously, Fassbinder and these other filmmakers have found the traditional oppressive stereotypes of women's roles can be exposed. In the *Merchant of Four Seasons* when Fassbinder exaggerates and stylizes beyond all venemittitude the suffering housewife stereotype (who puts up with being beaten and weeps perfect glycerine tears half-way down her right cheek), it's *Il wagger*, is what he is up to.

## IV Problematics and Progress

I said that Fassbinder's perspective has included a whole range of social problematics. There is only one space to sketch the contours of this accomplishment.

When there are specific social issues dealt with in his work. At least three of his films, for example, deal with the situation of the *Gastarbeiter* — the "guest laborers" or temporary immigrants who provide most of the unskilled labor for the German economy. In many

cases, they fill jobs that Germans are unwilling to do. In *Kazelmacher* (1969), Fassbinder himself plays a Greek *Gastarbeiter*, and, as in his later masterpiece *Alli*, a romance between the immigrant and a German woman serves to set off the many contradictions in the story's social environment.

The latter film contains a scene which articulates with stunning precision the way in which *Gastarbeiter* are manipulated so as to do the worst class as a whole and keep wages down. The scene unfolds during the check-out of a group of cleaning women, among them the aging heroine who has married *Alli*. The women are gathered together on a steep staircase for their sandwiches, together with a new co-worker *Yolande*, just arrived from Yugoslavia. The German women move away from *Yolande* to huddle on a landing just out of earshot to discuss their wages (higher than *Yolande's*, of course) and the possibility of getting a raise — a raise that would not benefit *Yolande* since "she's not in the same category anyway."

However, his attention is most compellingly drawn to the general contradictions of our society: the oppression exerted by the institution of our society, the oppression exerted by the institution of the family, alienation in work, the internalization of domination in relations of class, violence in mass-church... these contradictions are confronted with the unabashed directness that has become Fassbinder's trademark.

The landscape of contemporary Germany is continually evoked as an integral of these contradictions, as cause and reflection of the psychological and material conditions of Fassbinder's characters. *Wildwechsel*, for example, an austere told teenage love story made in 1972 (the title means "Wildlife Crossing"), is set in a drab provincial town where the family of the young man is a poultry processing plant. The 19-year-old motorcyclist hero and his friends are constantly seen in relation to their work at the plant. Long lines of suspended, naked chickens form a backdrop to their tedious, mechanical work. Forceful Godardian tracking-shots up and down the assembly line of chicken processors seem to post a connection between the squeal of factory life and inevitable violence which will destroy the hero's romantic dreams. It has to be this obvious on the screen because the dreams sometimes blur the connections in real life.

If we compare Fassbinder's work to that of the other current *Wunderkind* of the international film festivals, Werner Herzog (*The Enigma of Kasper Hauser*, and *Aguirre, Wrath of God*), the contrast is startling. Herzog's films are largely concerned with posing labored philosophical questions in heavily mythologized, historical or exotic settings. Herzog himself expresses no interest in the domestic German audience, and in fact is quite unashamed to admit

that he is making films for hypothetical future audiences who alone will be able to appreciate his art. In the context of such, let us say, unseasonedness, Fassbinder's stature as an artist of commanding relevance is indisputable.

I would not want my admiration for Fassbinder to pass as totally unqualified and uncritical. There are already enough Fassbinder freaks drooling over his art in the cinemas of the western world — thanks to the West German government which actively pushes its new young filmmakers in the interests of German cultural prestige.

I am simply saying that Fassbinder is saying a lot of things worth listening to. His films ought to continue to find an audience in the gay community, despite the widespread criticism he has met in the gay activist press.

Having said this, I would be dishonest not to articulate one or two questions I have about this remarkable filmmaker. For me, his major liability is his susceptibility to misinterpretation by his foreign and non-specialist audiences. There is a definite temptation to read his highly stylized, exaggerated use of melodramatic conventions as camp or parody, a sensibility that Fassbinder emphatically disavows. I occasionally find myself asking exactly how a certain particularly outrageous gesture or detail of dialogue is to be interpreted, if not with those distinctive squeals which those of us who have a weakness for *Divine*, say, sometimes greet her presence in our more vulnerable moments. A very deliberate line is to be drawn between Fassbinder's sensibility and that of *Divine's* impresario, John Waters, or the presumptuous, execrable mockery of Fassbinder's Swiss contemporary, Daniel Schmid, who confuses things by using some of Fassbinder's actors. Occasionally Fassbinder makes that line difficult to draw, and it is only the context of his whole career which makes it definitely possible.

Fassbinder can also be guilty of a vision so arcane that it cannot be penetrated. There are occasions when he reveals in an ambiguity that is baffling rather than stimulating. In my opinion, Fassbinder has hovered at times dangerously close to a kind of intellectualized formalism which has too often been the refuge of gay artists within the artistic avant-garde. (Curiously, the debate within *Gay Left* over Fox alludes at one point to four American gays, apparently disapprovingly, who have contributed to the American underground cinema — Kenneth Anger, Constance Beeson, Jack Smith, and Gregory Markopoulos — all examples, as far as I'm concerned, of this lamentable elitist tendency among gays involved in High Art.)

Fassbinder himself speaks of his early films, many of which are rather baroque reworkings of American gangster-film formulae, as being "too elitist, and too private, just made for myself and a few trends... You must respect your audience more than I did." In this respect, it is certainly a credit to Fassbinder that, as his career develops, the moments of self-indulgence, the "onanistic" tendencies (as he puts it) become less and less important in his work, and more and more he communicates with his audience by means of his distinctive, socially engaged form of realism.

One final question stems from the almost overwhelming tone of despair, of defeatism, if you like, which dominates the majority of Fassbinder's films. As far as I can remember, there is only one happy ending in the ten or so

Fassbinders that I've managed to see, and that one is qualified by a predictable toughness and ambivalence. I'm referring to the conclusion of *Alli*, the most romantic Fassbinder that I ever expect to see. The pressures of family and society "have split up the heroine and her young Moroccan husband, but Fassbinder comes with a self-indulgent sentimental moment of reconciliation, in the literally rose light of the dance floor where they first met. But Fassbinder cuts this short. *Alli* collapses on a mysterious internal injury which a kindly doctor explains, quite plausibly, comes from the stress of being an immigrant worker. So after these rapid lumbous, the final scene finds the pair facing an uncertain future in *Alli's* hospital room, a future which only our Hollywood upbringing and the tenderness on the dance floor lead us to believe is possible.

Elsawhera, Fassbinder does not let us forget that the vicious circles and traps of our society and our lives often do not escape, and this insistence would seem inconsistent with his personal conviction. For example, the pessimistic observations when an interviewer asked him about anarchists, the target of rather blunt satire in one of his most recent films:

...I'm very interested in finding out how one can use the strength these people [anarchists] have. Now it's very important to me to make very positive films, and they are very clever people. They have great intellectual potential, but also an over-sensitive despair which I don't know how one would use constructively.

What is curious is that one is often tempted to describe Fassbinder's work itself in terms of "over-sensitive despair."

The issue is further complicated in that Fassbinder's series of five television films on working-class life (it was to be eight but the government network got nervous) expressed an optimism, a faith in collective strength, that his films have seldom even hinted at. Again an interview shed some light on the question. The TV series, entitled *Eight Hours Don't Make a Day*, departed in such a radical new direction for Fassbinder because

all the plays and films I've written for were designed for an intellectual audience, and with the intellectuals one can easily allow oneself to be pessimistic and end without hope, because an intellectual is both prepared and inclined to reflect over it. But for the large audience which television offers, it would have been reactionary, nearly criminal, in fact, to represent the world as futile. Their world looks pretty futile to them in the first place, so one's just got to try and encourage them and say: You've got possibilities anyway. You've got power to bear because your oppressors are dependent upon you. What is an employer without employees? Nothing. On the other hand, one can well imagine workers without employers. This attitude was the principal reason that for the first time I made something positive, hopeful. With an audience of 25 million ordinary people, you can't allow yourself anything else.

The appearance of three new Fassbinders every year, without any signs of fading, each one breaking new ground in some direction or other is, however, undeniably something positive. And maybe one of them will turn out to be our film after all. □

## Books

## Sexual Variance in Society and History

Vern Bulough  
Wiley, 1976, \$27.75

History, like everything else, it seems, is subject to the dictates of fashion, and the historical world of the late twentieth century appears to have discovered that human sexuality is indeed fashionable. And God knows, it is about time, for what has up till now been written about "sex" in history is usually misleading, often malicious, intentionally or otherwise, and downright foolish. This may be taken as an especially apt description of what passes for the history of homosexual behaviour, for in a field which is only beginning to study women and the family, homosexuality rather resembles a battered child claim in a family of mental defectives, in the light of this unsurprising but nonetheless sorry state of affairs, Vern Bulough's latest book is to be welcomed. For Bulough has, at the very least, written in a more or less neutral manner and without any noticeable special pleading about subjects which are normally either ignored or deformed out of all recognition. Pride of place in his work has, of course, been reserved for male and female homosexuality. But other, now increasingly chic, although once carefully hidden, variations, in particular transvestism and transsexuality, are also covered, and we are taken on minor excursions into historical bestiality, masturbation, sadomasochism, adultery and prostitution as well.

In other words, Bulough's subjects are the detritus of western civilization, the distasteful side of its sexuality, and it is on the sexuality of "the West" from its classical and Christian roots to the present that he has focused, with only brief looks at the more exotic worlds of Islam, India and China. That his subjects can all be placed in the category of distasteful sexuality and that, as the author claims, they have often been "lumped with" homosexuality in the past, is perhaps sufficient justification for treating matters so diverse in origin and content in a single volume.

Bulough's work has many solid—one is tempted to say bourgeois—virtues. Above all, he is a tireless collector of sources and facts, and his notes are a good place for both scholars and others interested in the subject to search for starting-points for their own work. It is in fact his text, a synthesis of numerous original and not-so-original searches into several thousand years of history, is often rather chaotic and ill-organized, but this is, at least in part, a product of the disparateness of his subject matter as well as of his attempt to write for several, very differently equipped audiences at once. Bulough does make a considerable number of errors, but this too is simply an occupational hazard for all who would write in fields other than their own, and who are, therefore, reduced to dependency upon the more detailed writings of "experts." Such minor blemishes, moreover, are not very significant when all is said and done. The most that one might claim is that Bulough's book is somewhat premature, not having been preceded by the mass of careful, detailed studies necessary to a general synthetic work of this sort. Indeed, it is important to realize that even in a field like Greek history, where sexuality has always been studied, homosexuality is not well served by the existing literature. Only recently has the promise of better things to come begun to bear hesitant fruit.

This is not to say that Bulough himself is unaware of the quality of his sources. He knows full well that the secondary literature is biased and inaccurate, and that what the societies he is studying tell us about their own sexuality is not

always to be trusted. Who, after all, in a generation which follows that of Marx and Freud is so naive as to take the self-explanation of society or individual at simple face-value? In a world in which it is increasingly evident that we know very little about our own sexuality, it is understandable that we should be somewhat sceptical of our ability to understand that of others.

It is the recognition of this difficulty which has in large measure dictated the nature of Bulough's attempt to understand the past. "Facts" are inaccessible or untrustworthy, but attitudes can be studied because, after all, that is essentially what the sources provide. St. Paul or Augustine, the code of Hammurabi or that of Napoleon—these may be unreliable as guides to the actual sexual practices of their societies, but as guides to its ideology (or, at least, that of its dominant classes) they are the very stuff of living history. And since, inevitably, Bulough's is a history of attitudes towards sexuality. This in itself has its dangers, and unfortunately these dangers are amply illustrated by Bulough's work.

Bulough's focus on attitudes leads him to accept the essentialist position that ideas and attitudes which create history by themselves. Thus, for Bulough, it is particular Biblical injunctions or peculiar Greek "aesthetic" traditions which cause later negative judgements on and treatment of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. Why later societies should accept those notions, and why they literally hang around for so many generations, somehow seizing upon the minds of human beings, remains unexplained.

Sexuality is not simply a matter of ideas and attitudes, but at least as much of institutions. All human societies, unlike animal species, institutionalize sexuality in a variety of ways, using it to construct and confirm the social order. Sexuality is therefore inextricably intertwined with and embedded in other aspects of human life. If cannot be dismissed for any society without a serious knowledge of that society's economic structures, its social structures, including its class relationships, its familial institutions and the respective roles it provides for its male and female members, among other things. And these institutions will vary considerably from society to society, creating significantly different patterns of understanding. At times Bulough seems to understand this—he does write at length about the role of women, for example, an understanding of whose position in most societies is critical for our understanding of that of homosexuality—but he never really ties the pieces together or goes beneath the ideological surface. Thus, to use an example from his treatment of Greek antiquity, he is aware that the Athenian statesman Solon is said to have been opposed to male prostitution (p. 112), but neglects the fact, which alone makes the story meaningful, that it is prostitution by citizens that is in question; other forms of male prostitution (by slaves or other non-citizens) are irrelevant to the legislator.



THE BERDACHE: "To place such diverse matters as the ritual cross-dressing practiced in antiquity, the *berdache* of the North American Indian tribes, and seemingly related institutions known from other societies, all within the contemporary category of transvestitism is misleading."

After George Cathelin (1796-1872), Club des Libraires de France, Paris.

Bulough's problem here is the product of a still wider misconception. Bulough's neutrality does not allow him to evaluate the theories and interpretations of his predecessors critically, or to create new and compelling ones of his own. Indeed, he appears to hold a belief that "Facts" more or less lie around waiting for the neutral researcher to discover them: "I have not," he writes, "adopted any theory about sexuality, whether Freudian, Marxian, or Augustinian, but have accepted sexuality as a biological fact." (p. xi).

This is refreshingly quaint, but not very useful. The past presents itself to us only in the guise of a mass of meaningless "data," which the historian must put together into a comprehensible form. To abandon this task under the pretense that facts exist outside of the human mind is to abdicate the prime responsibility of the scholar. In practice such an abdication normally means that the theorist on either side simply accepted uncritically, and often unknowingly, by the supposedly neutral observer, and this is precisely what Bulough has done.

One sees this clearly in the very categories into which he organizes his material: "homosexuality," "transvestitism," and the like. These are nowhere defined, and nowhere does Bulough give the impression that he is aware that they are very modern categories, themselves in need of exploration to determine their usefulness for the past. For example, to place such diverse matters as the ritual cross-dressing of antiquity, the *berdache* of the North American Indian tribes, and seemingly related institutions known from other societies, all within the contemporary category of transvestitism is fundamentally misleading. These institutions do, of course, share some features in common, but they are hardly identical and they play utterly different roles in the societies in which they appear.

By the same token, even the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality may not be very useful for every society or even for most of them. Homosexuals and heterosexuals, with particular lifestyles and more-or-less exclusive sexual patterns do exist in our world, but that is a fairly recent development. Not to understand this is to make homosexuality and heterosexuality into conditions (like diseases) which completely characterize individuals, rather than the groups of detachable acts. In many primitive societies, as well as in societies as sophisticated as that of classical Greece, the same persons could, for example, engage at different times and—for different purposes—in a variety of heterosexual or homosexual activities. This means that homosexuality and heterosexuality did indeed exist, but that homosexuals and heterosexuals as such did not. The later categories appear to arise only in more complex and highly urbanized societies, for which post-classical Greece and Rome, in the ancient world, and bourgeois society in Europe and America since the Renaissance, in modern times, provide examples. And even in those

societies the categories are hardly as absolute as some would prefer to have it.

To accept the underlying assumptions of Bulough's point of view (a position shared by many others within the gay community itself) inevitably leads us to view ourselves as a kind of biological, ethnic or racial category cutting across all of history. It misleads us as to the position we actually occupy in our own society and thus incapacitates us to fight the real political and social struggles of the present and future. It makes us believe that our oppression is one of "incorrect attitudes" only, and it renders the past incapable of highlighting the uniqueness of the present, and thus makes the past essentially meaningless except as the site of a foolish and self-serving game in which the number of homosexuals in every historical society is counted, after which we all congratulate each other that "we" have, after all, always been there. Bulough's book is, therefore, praiseworthy as a starting point for the study of homosexuality in history, but it remains a starting point only.

by Robert Padgug

## In Her Day

Rita Mae Brown  
Daughters Inc. (Press Gang in Canada), 1976, \$4.50

"It is art in politics we must deal with people as they are, not as we wish them to be. Only by working with the real can you get closer to the ideal." So says the "Note to the Feminist Reader" which opens *In Her Day*. Political striving for the ideal makes perfect sense in the how politics can be so paralyzing baffles this feminist reader.

The plot of *In Her Day* is the story of the quests—whether conscious or not—of two women who have each lost an important facet of life without seeming to notice its passing. Carol Hanratty is an Art History professor who in the course of 46 years of life, many of those years pursuing her career, had lost her sense of adventure. Ise James, a waitress in a feminist restaurant, had spent the last two of her 23 years "in struggle" for women's liberation and had lost her sense of beauty and, sometimes, her sense of herself. The two women, and their fascination with the differences that separate them draw these two women and their worlds together briefly. An exchange of ideas and experiences enriches each in turn.

Ise James is, unfortunately, a cardboard character, a stereotype. All rhetoric and predictable conflicts. A feminist on the surface, with nothing below but a resentment of the "middle class" background from which she so desperately and comically seeks to escape. By contrast, Carol Hanratty is more "real" of the two. We are allowed to catch glimpses of the past that reveal some of the forces that shaped this intriguing woman.

This unevenness of character development means that the enrichment the women gain through their relationship remains on a superficial level. While Carol and Ise learn from each other, neither seems aware of the other's development, nor is either concerned about making her lover aware of the influence she is having and the positive changes that result. The novel ends on an uncertain note. The two women have changed in direction, they are still quite different directions and neither Carol nor Ise seem inclined to evaluate the experience as a whole.

But Rita Mae Brown's intention in bringing these two together seems to be more than to allow us valuable insights into the lives of two women. It is for the strong woman many of her lesbian readers strive to be. She brings two worlds together to permit a dialogue that serves political ends. There is nothing wrong with this per se. But when art is sacrificed for the sake of politics, art fails to do what it should be doing. *In Her Day* should first have been

# Our Image

artistically convincing. By stopping short of a full exploration of her characters Brown does not reach as far as she might have.

Despite its heavy emphasis, the political "message" contained in *Her Day* is ambiguous. Brown seems to say that our haste to build a movement for our liberation, lesbians and women in general have overlooked many of our potential strengths and allies — especially those that lie in the past, in our roots, and in the women who carried on "the struggle" in their individual lives before there was a movement. She risks condemnation by the movement she helped create by taking a stand in favor of leadership and (in a less forceful way) organization. But she pushes forward no organization, but she pushes forward no time of her initial involvement to her present-day criticisms. Nor does she propose a direction for the future. The one point in the novel at which it would be appropriate to do so is passed over with individual women exacting revenge from individual men (both within and without the movement). While these feminists claim to be acting realistically rather than idealistically and to be refusing to act "lady-like" any longer, their anonymity makes their actions ineffective; no better than polite, lady-like, behind-the-scenes deals with women's oppressors. No further solution, no alternative is presented.

There is no doubt that Rita Mae Brown's writing has power. In *Her Day* is written in the same language and with the same force that has moved many of us in Brown's previous novel and in her poetry.



Rita Mae Brown

Now that I've mentioned it, I must submit to the temptation to compare *Her Day* to its predecessor, *Rubyrut Jungla*. I read *Her Day* trying desperately to let it stand on its own and to ignore how much *Rubyrut Jungla* had inspired and influenced me. But deep down inside I hoped for the same inspiration. I knew I was expecting a lot but, after all, it was Rita Mae Brown who set my standards so high. *Rubyrut Jungla*'s greatest strength is its convincing and complete heroine, Molly Bolt. On the other hand, in *Her Day*'s reluctance to deal with its two women in depth is its greatest weakness.

I'm sure I read *Her Day*. I'm sure I'll read it again and perhaps I'll get more out of it a second time. I'm hoping the disappointment will be lessened by closer examination. I am certain about one thing: that the dynamism and insight that was barely contained in *Rubyrut Jungla* still lurks in my favorite lesbian novelist, and that with time and growth, we can safely expect to see it reproduced.

by Christine Bearchell □

## The Church and the Homosexual

John J. McNeill, S.J.,  
Sheed, Andrews & McNeil, 1976,  
\$11.50

In 1974, Father McNeill, a founder of Dignity, was forbidden by his Jesuit superiors to speak, publish or teach anything on the question of homosexuality until his work was examined by a commission of theologians. Although challenging traditional Church teachings and

pastoral practice, his book was judged by that commission to be a "sane work meeting the standards of scholarship for publication of a book on an important but controversial moral issue." Since the Church's official teaching on sexuality does not claim to be infallible and immutable, it is possible that the Church might, at some time in the future, modify its position. Therefore, the ecclesiastical imprimi potest was granted this year.

Relying on recent biblical scholarship, McNeill critically re-examines what have been interpreted as scriptural condemnations of homosexuality. He categorically denies that the offense of Sodom and Gomorrah had any relation to homosexuality. This is quite important given the central place the destruction of "the cities of the plain" has played in the homophobic imagination. McNeill further argues that the proscriptions against homosexual behavior in both Old and New Testaments must be interpreted in the context of their original intent. To read the modern meaning of homosexuality into scriptural passages is a misleading and dangerous anachronism. It is only temple prostitution and homosexual behavior of heterosexual men which is condemned in the scriptures, the "condition" of being gay, which McNeill refers to as "give and take unrelated to free will, is not the object. Since male homosexuality was perceived as an offense against the masculine values of a patriarchal society, what women did with each other was not deemed important.

Continuing his exploration of the historical development of the Church's denigration of homosexuality through the Church Fathers, McNeill shows how the traditional homophobic edifice was built on what he has already shown to be false scriptural bases. An especially damaging accretion was the great influence of stoic philosophy with its total rejection of love and sexual pleasure in any form for anyone. The heavily procreative bias of the stoics reinforced narrow, legalistic interpretations of scriptures. For instance, whereas the earliest (Yahvist) portion of the creation story in *Genesis* gave companionship as Eve's reason for being, the later (Priestly) story gave procreation. The latter was exclusively emphasized by stoic-influenced early Christians. Moral theology was largely reduced to demands for submission to the "natural" structure and order of the species. An alternative moral philosophy which McNeill calls "practical," has only re-emerged in recent years within Catholicism. For fifteen centuries, "the dominant Catholic approach to sexual morality inordinately placed all the emphasis on the biological and physical aspects of the sexual act, ignoring the interpersonal context in which the act takes place."

His careful historical and linguistic analyses are presented in a quite lucid and readable exposition. These sections will fascinate most readers, but the remaining sections will come as a revelation to few members of the gay community. Nonetheless, the book of considerable significance as a model accepting homosexuality, and should be read by all Christians, gay and straight.

A review of social scientific literature understates the case against seeing any connection between homosexuality and mental illness. McNeill in fact ignores the work of Nitsche, Liddick, Armon, Change and Block, Dean and Richardson, and most of the studies of Evelyn Hooker and Mark Freedman. These studies provide a great deal of evidence to buttress his position that there is nothing intrinsically ill about gay people. Unless homosexuality is defined as pathological in itself (or judges are told who is what), gay and straight samples cannot be distinguished reliably by "diagnostic" personality tests.

The following section on what the church and society should and should learn from gay people and gay communities is interesting, but much of it consists of elaboration of a quote from Jung (which I consider sexist).

His critique of traditional pastoral policy towards gay people, however,

deserves to be definitive. He shows that demands for a conversion to heterosexuality or for total sexual abstinence are impossible and counterproductive. They create guilt, alienate gay men and women from "the community of believers," and foster rather than curb destructive and and depersonalized sexual behavior: they "undermine the development of healthy interpersonal relationships among homosexuals and give the appearance that the Church disapproved more of the love between homosexuals than it did of their sexual activity." Furthermore, the Church ministered to individual "moral problems" when it should have helped build community and sought homophobia in its own house.

From his review of scripture, social sciences, the history of official theology and official pastoral practice, McNeill concludes that there is no basis for maintaining invidious distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual love. Both must be judged by the same moral principles. These must be humanistic rather than legalistic. Some criteria which he suggests are mutuality, fidelity, unselfishness and unexploitableness. He does not attempt to spell out any specific moral code, since he recognizes that only the gay community can define what "ethically responsible gay relationships" are.

McNeill has been criticized by some for legitimizing only monogamous imitations of traditional marriage, although he clearly attacks the patriarchal heritage and the distortions of human relationship such as ethic causes. McNeill's book may not be liberation, but it is liberating. To systematically destroy the bases used to justify oppression, as he does, is an extremely important contribution. I do not think it is reasonable to expect Father McNeill to have attacked every received notion at once, or for that matter, to lead either the church or the gay community into the Promised Land.



Father John McNeill, S.J.

As he says, gay communities must carve out their own ethics and their own vision of "human nature" — inside or outside Christianity. The ethics for relationships he proposes are, I think, intended to apply to a society which has overcome oppression. That is, they are moral ultimate principles. Then, the criteria for ethical relationships should not distinguish the sex of partners. But so long as there is persecution against one and institutional sanctions of the other, no reasonable person can expect gay relationships to be even so stable as straight ones.

by Stephen Murray □

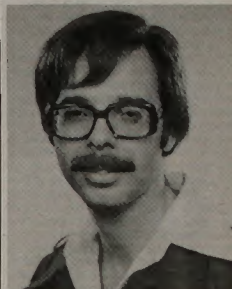
## Propos pour une libération (homo)sexuelle

Paul-François Sylvestre  
Éditions de l'Autre, Montreal,  
1976, \$7.95 (paper)

Something novel and a chance to practice your French — a book about six months in the life of a Franco-Ontarian gay who was accused of gross indecency in the Ottawa "male prostitution ring" scandal of March 1975 and as a result came out as a gay activist in the capital city. The book was released in September by Éditions de l'Autre as part of the fifth anniversary celebrations

of Gays of Ottawa/Gais de l'Ottawa.

The title, "ideas for (homo)sexual liberation," is a bit misleading. The book is not an essay, but a diary. There is a bit of essay-like analysis, about sex roles for instance, and a useful bibliography of writings in French by and about gays. But mostly the author gives us descriptions of scenes of his family and work life, sexual encounters and relationships, and activities in Gays of Ottawa. This makes for a rather unique look on one page a sketch of a pick-up in the park and on the next a gay liberation meeting. The linking theme is that each successive event enables the author to "become more himself," as he puts it, in the diary's first entry.



Paul-François Sylvestre

For me the big drawback of the book is that the possibilities of the diary form are lost to a considerable extent, mostly I think because Sylvestre has not started the story at its real beginning. There are allusions, even on the front cover, to his arrest by the Ottawa police in March 1975, but the diary does not begin until December of that year.

This means that the event in which the author personally faced overt oppression is all but absent from the book. He often mentions cases of conflict between the gay movement and the powers that be: the Damien case, the bad reaction Gays of Ottawa got when it presented a brief on dangerous sexual offenders legislation to a parliamentary committee. But his own experience of conflict is distant. There is only a short personal recollection in the entry for December 2, followed in the January 4 entry by an eight-page reportage on the scandal. In other words, too much objective description and not enough of the author's interior experience of events.

Doubtless there is great value in reminding readers of the press reaction and how it led to the suicide of Warren Zuleti, another of those arrested in dangerous sexual offenders legislation to a parliamentary committee. But his own experience of conflict is distant. There is only a short personal recollection in the entry for December 2, followed in the January 4 entry by an eight-page reportage on the scandal. In other words, too much objective description and not enough of the author's interior experience of events.

Besides the lack of light from the past, I also had a feeling of something missing in the present, for instance in the account of the author's relations with his family. The family reaction seems to have been positive, except from his father. But the story of his father is told entirely through the eyes of his sympathetic mother, so again the sense of conflict is lost. A lengthy entry about his first encounter with his father after coming out to his family would have added a lot.

There are several interesting comments in the family vignettes, but they pass by in a hurry and are not followed up. In the entry for Christmas Day 1975: "I feel such a stranger here in my own family. I am the linking of Michel" (with whom he had spent night a couple of days earlier). But in a conversation with his sister we find a quite different feeling about family-type relations in this decidedly odd statement: "If I were to go to bed with a woman, I think you are the only one I would feel at ease with." The

theme of gay people and the family thus remains a backdrop, though surely it should be central to any 'ideas about homosexual liberation'.

Another kind of conflict touched on but not explored before the author came out: he was an activist in the fight for the rights of the francophone minority in Ontario. The interesting thing here is not the parallel between that and the author's current fight for the homosexual minority but the evocation of a conflict in the past: "To be honest, I had a great time in those younger days. I did not hold for the francophones of Canada. But today I wonder why I was always so busy. Why all that work and endless study? Why was I such a serious person? Why did I accept a life without emotion, without sex?" Vital questions. What brings a gay man out and what makes him fight for his rights? How do conflicts like this one last for a time and then get resolved? It was moved by this passage in its context and was waiting for more, but no more came.

One last example of the way a conflict is raised only to vanish is in the series of encounters that are described. The author questions himself as to whether it is the brief physical encounter that he seeks or something else. But there is no real reflection leading to an answer, just the brief — though very valuable — suggestion that the answer cannot be found without looking at the institutions of the gay community (bars, parks and now gay organizations) that shape his life.

The last entry in the diary, like the first, describes a sexual encounter — in language which is almost identical. Although we know that a lot had happened to the author, there is not really a sense that much has changed.

We see the author almost always in a calm state of mind on the day of an entry. Thus we cannot relate the apparent calm of most days to the underlying torors at work, because they are not before us enough. The landmarks by which we may judge change are not sufficiently visible. Such landmarks are small in real life, it's true, but in literary reflection they should be made large. Fictionalizing is not a departure from reality but an attempt to see beneath its surface. The journalistic approach the author uses cannot adequately reveal human character development.

The generally muted tone of the diary is reinforced by the language used. Though very different types of activity are portrayed, and though the diary form makes possible the use of a wide variety of styles (conversational, reflective, descriptive, dramatic) the language is unchanging, even in the three poems the author includes. The language is at a fairly high literary level, which I have not attempted to convey in the extracts translated in this review. Often I found it inappropriate, especially for the descriptions of sex. Here I may be culturally prejudiced, as an anglophone Canadian, about what are appropriate linguistic forms. However, I am sure I am right in saying the conversations are not recorded in the kind of language people talk. At one point the author says he is going to transcribe a conversation with his mother. What follows may give the content of what they said, but certainly not the form and flavor.

The lengthiness of my criticisms here is not intended to reflect how well I liked the book, just the care I'm stating what I found wrong. I recommend the book, particularly to those for whom a gay activist remains something of an unknown quantity. The totally self-affirming outlook of the author is not something gay readers can find in many books. And I am sure gay readers will find, as I did, resonances of events in their own lives.

The idea of linking the life of an individual to political struggle is one I hope the author follows up. Certainly most of the questions that need answering are being asked. I would look to another book on the events leading up to the point where *Propos* begins.

by Brian Mossop

**Oscar Wilde**

H. Montgomery Hyde  
Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1975,  
\$15.00

Eyre, Methuen, 1976, \$21.95

**Oscar Wilde**

Louis Kronenberg  
Little, Brown, 1976, \$10.50

**Oscar Wilde**

Sheridan Morley  
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976,  
\$14.95

"Nothing can be more absurdly untrue," wrote Lord Alfred Douglas in 1937, "than the assertion which is invariably made by about half the reviewers when a new book about Wilde comes out — that the subject is exhausted and that nobody wants to hear any more about it. The subject will never be exhausted, just precisely because of its human and dramatic interest."

Forty years later, the assertion continues to be made as books about the Irish writer and wit continue to be published. For Wilde's dramatic rise and fall is as perennially engrossing as those of Jesus, Napoleon and Hitler will always be.

Among the authors of the three latest very different volumes on Wilde, only Sheridan Morley thinks to make the point that the offenses for which Wilde was punished by two years "hard labor" are still punishable in Britain — and, one could add, in Canada — today, a number of the men involved were under 21 and the laws in both countries are very explicit! In this respect, nothing has changed in almost a century.

Two of the biographers — Montgomery Hyde and Louis Kronenberg — seem to have no qualms about rehashing old



Oscar Wilde wearing his Canadian coat.

apocrypha about Wilde, and, in Hyde's case, earnestly presenting even some of the more preposterous theories about Oscar's sexuality — for example, Bernard Shaw's idea that he was a victim of "pathological gigantism!" Such theories as this, and Robert Serrard's that Wilde was homosexual only during secret epileptic fits, arise from the still current view that there is always "a reason" for sexuality which is disapproved by the powers that be, and that therefore responsible commentators must solemnly advance such "reasons" (even if they are patently idiotic).

In line with this approach, Hyde (who refers to Wilde as a "pathological case study") digs up another old canard and trots its carcass round again: this is that Wilde only "turned to homosexuality" at the instigation of Robert Ross, and after he discovered he had gonorrhea. So as not to contaminate his wife, he started bedding boys!

Sheridan Morley points out that, on the evidence of Wilde's published letters alone, he was obviously "a thoroughly experienced homosexual" by the time he left Oxford, long before his marriage.

When Eric Bentley wrote to Hyde asking him whether he thought "Oscar didn't mind giving syph to his own," he got no reply!

Montgomery Hyde's is the bulkiest of these books; he has done a lot of research, but has ignored a lot too, including that of Rupert Croft-Cooke on Wilde's sex-life (chronicled in his *The Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde*). Hyde has produced a porous and sometimes appallingly silly book, a great disappointment considering his earlier books on the same writer, and on Gary history.

Louis Kronenberg's study is slighter, retells a number of amusing but dubious stories about the great man, and tries a little too hard to be clever, but it is better written than Hyde's, and more enjoyable to read.

Morley's book is by far the best of the three, the liveliest, the most careful and the most sensible — a worthwhile addition to the vast literature in various languages about a man who is still the best known "martyr" for what many still regard as dead the judge who sentenced Wilde and Alfred Taylor: "There is no worse crime," he pronounced, "than that with which the prisoners are charged."

by Ian Young

**Superstar Murder?**

**A Prose Flick**

John Paul Hudson & Warren Wexler

Insider Press, 1976

When the people at the *Body Politic* asked me what sort of books I'd be interested in reviewing, I answered "froth."

I wanted to clarify my bent right from the start so I wouldn't be deluged with manifestos, tracts, analyses and other assorted ideological small presses. Dazzling Finbarish novellae, smart lapidary poetry, no-holds-barred literary biography. And all of it gay of course.

Then my bona fide reviewer's copy arrived. I'm sure Wilde would have been able to whip up a supremely witty epigram about the difference between froth and scum, but after wading my way through all 347 pages of *Superstar Murder?*, I feel too mucky for wit.

*Superstar Murder?*, a mystery a cleft set in Manhattan, concerns itself with the suspected murder/disappearance/abduction of a superstar singer named Bess Mitman.

The whole a cleft bit is handled with the least amount of subtlety and imagination. Bette Midler and countless other New York regulars are quite obviously the models for the ill-assorted characters working their way through the mire that passes for plot.

An admirably named Spot is the character that somehow makes it all congenial. A *raff* in every possible sense of the word, Spot sounds like he was put together by a computer programmed with the composite sexual fantasies of Advocate-readers: tall, butch, young, muscular, semi-straight, Spot wanders through the entanglement of the book wearing out-offs with a slight rip in the rear.

Over the course of the book Spot — in addition to solving the mystery — gradually comes out, thus providing the authors (*Superstar Murder?*) is not a feat that could have been accomplished singlehandedly with multiple chances at working out of-the-closest rhetoric into their already faltering exposition.

One would like to applaud and say the authors' hearts are properly located — the liberation banner is hoisted rarely enough in fiction these days — but the fact that Spot's quest for a gay identity ends with his joining Bess Mitman's entourage leaves me cheerless.

The authors' various essays at countering sexism, demanding civil rights and encouraging gay openness sound curiously like the ranting of a first I couldn't figure out why — the attitudes

expressed, although not grounded very well either politically or historically (the whole gay movement began in 1950 in Greenwich Village?), are essentially adequate. But indubitably insincere nevertheless.

The other thing that bothered me was a particularly vicious caricature of the Village Voice's Arthur Bell. In the book he appears as Edgar Ball (of the Village Vision), and a nastier bludgeoning a cleft would be hard-pressed to find.

Admittedly Bell works for a straight paper in a token position, but he has managed to do some decent articles now and again; there was his piece on the murder of John Knight (the closet-quarter newspaper heir), the frequent persistent badgerings of New York City councilmen concerning gay rights, the series he did a few years back on Mafia control of New York gay bars.

And suddenly, tucked away on page 260 of *Superstar Murder?*, comes a paragraph that makes everything fall together — the insincerity, the uneasy hipness, the overly nasty caricature of Bell. A gay bartender for a gay bar blithely tells Spot, "forget that propaganda that we're Mafia-controlled. That's the fiction the Vision and Edgar Ball put out. Probably to make a smokescreen to hide their connections. Big business, political machines and Old Money. Bartenders know."

Not bad for an impassioned denial of Mafia control and an implicit rationalization for it.

The co-author (with Warren Wexler) of *Superstar Murder?* is John Paul Hudson. You may remember him as the author of something a few years back called *The Gay Insider*.

The *Gay Insider*, for those of you who've never seen it, was a bar guide. Not just a book of listings, The *Gay Insider* carried personal testimonials by the author himself.

Stagnated hipness in the testimonials and the laying down of a good gay line, but underlying it all, that sense of sleaze that permeates *Superstar Murder?*

John Paul Hudson once wrote bar guides. Now he's written a novel that devotes much space and ill-spaced wit to denigrating a gay reporter and his attempts at exposing Mafia domination of an important part of gay life. Need we say more?

by Will Aitken

Equines about this book may be directed to The Gay Insider, Box 439, Ansonia Station, New York, NY 10023, USA.

**Music**

**Living With Lesbians**

Alix Dobkin  
Women's Wax Works, 1976,  
\$6.99

*Living With Lesbians* is the second record on which you can hear Alix Dobkin. It is completely woman-made, and is a powerful taste of lesbian pride, as was *Lavender Jane Loves Women*, her first album. Both of these records are high quality, musically and technically. In fact, it is so inspiring to see the development of women's recording companies in the past few years, after growing up to a chorus of "women just don't have a talent for electronics."

No one could possibly find this collection of songs monotonous. Alix Dobkin's Macedonian origin influences some of the songs. "Dejka Sunseto" for instance, is a traditional Bulgarian song with two harmonizing voices, unaccompanied. What results is the kind of music that gives you shivers on the spine.

The album is dedicated to "the woodoo queens who invented jazz." "Toughen Up," one of the most moving statements on rape I've ever heard is arranged to a jazz accompaniment. It starts from New York police statistics that indicate that the women most likely to be raped are those trained for service jobs. She's restrained, and trained to be sweet, to smile, or grow up defenseless as a child.

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## Our Image



There's no preparation for a girl to be a woman alone in this man's world... The song moves through the whole gamut of socialization that becomes a part of each of us — from fashions that limit physical activity and discourage self-assertion, to the belief that any gesture more friendly than a snarl on the part of a woman means she's "asking for it." This song will sound familiar to every woman; it touches on our upbringing, our jobs and schooling, and all the ropes and degradation that happen to women in a sexist society.

But then there are the humorous ones! As the comment on the jacket goes, "Amazon ABC — a saucy romp through the lesbian alphabet." The tune is a catchy kind, complete with fiddle music between verses. You'll find yourself humming it at the strangest moments — "A you're an Amazon, Becoming brave and strong, Clearly and Consciously you see..." or later "Q is for the queer you fear you are." The humor of the oppressed often has a certain bite to it.

The theme that this album is built upon is one of dyke separatism: women leaving the cities and starting again in the country with lesbian communities. I don't think this is much of a solution to lesbian oppression — I'm the type who favors sticking around to fight. Being completely self-reliant is no doubt a positive experience for many women, but as Dobkin herself notes, sexism still comes out to haunt you. In the long run, and in the interests of humanity as a whole, it's more productive to stay in the thick of it where you can confront sexism and its causes head on.

But while we're here, we can sure use more music like **Living With Lesbians** by Alix Dobkin.

by Cheryl Pruitt □

## Songs of Love and Struggle

Eric Bentley  
Burton Auditorium  
York University  
Toronto

To overcome the barren impersonality of York University's Burton Auditorium and establish a mood of intimacy with the audience is no mean feat, particularly when all you're working with is a piano and a microphone. In recently accomplishing this, however, Eric Bentley missed a rare opportunity to deal openly and honestly with the oppression of gay people — a subject the noted author, playwright and critic has recently espoused in print (see BP's current review of CTR).

And considering the nature of Bentley's material, I don't think this was too much to hope for or, even, expect. The first half of the evening documented the struggles of nearly every oppressed group except gays (Blacks, Jews, women, workers) to win freedom and equality. Two of Bertholt Brecht's marching songs — "All or Nothing" and "Soldarity" — established the distinctly political tone of the evening and suggested that Bentley might eventually address the persecution of gays, particularly when he turned to "the various forms of love" that were to form the second half of the evening.

But this, apparently, was not the time or place for Mr Bentley to champion gay rights, or even to sing about his own experience as a gay male. To give him his due, he did sing "The Queen of 42nd Street", his translation of Prevost's song about a transvestite prostitute, but her refrain ("If that's the way I am/What's it to you?") is a pretty weak charge, especially in the company of Brecht's "Prostitute Song" from *The Roundheads* and the *Pointedheads*. Nevertheless, it was a song with gay content. The only other of the evening was Bentley's own, "The Male Bitch", which would have been better left out. An insipid imitation of Noel Coward at his most trite, it perpetuated a stereotype that the audience obviously loved, but did little to develop the fresh portrait that Bentley said he was attempting. Similarly, Bentley's strangely sexual translation of Prevost's paean to adolescent love, "Teen-age Love", merely appealed to sentiment instead of packing a political punch. Moreover, it's sexlessness made it silly. The idea that teen-age lovers kissing in a Parisian doorway would provoke feelings of disgust and loathing makes no sense to me, unless the two are of the same sex. But what does Bentley tell us? "Kids that love each other/Are dead to the world/... in the dazzling clarity of their first love." Sing that to two eighteen-year-old lesbians!

Perhaps it is too much to expect Eric Bentley to champion the plight of gay youth, even in a program that tells of Nazi atrocities. But is it too much to expect a man of his distinction, a playwright who has dramatized the trials of Oscar Wilde and written a biting satire on the McCarthy "witchhunts" of the 1950's, to resist pandering to his audience with "personal" remarks like "All love songs are written by middle-aged men remembering teen-age girls."? Using lines like this, Bentley was able to overcome the handicaps of a squeaky voice, obscure piano arrangements and an alienating auditorium to establish a close rapport with his audience. But what for?

by Robert Wallace □

## All Our Lives

A Women's Songbook  
Joyce Cheney, Marcia Deihl & Deborah Silverstein (eds.)  
Diana Press, 1976, \$6.50

Well, here it finally is. A women's songbook with the music and guitar chords and complete lyrics to seventy songs by and about women. On a practical level, I've been waiting for a collection of this kind for a long time. I'm sure everyone has been in a position of hearing a song somewhere, and then waiting years before ever being it again or finding out all the words. As far as I can tell, nearly every song I've ever associated with women, and particularly lesbians, finds its place in these pages.

There is another angle to the value of a book like this, though. In leafing through it, you may wonder why you've never heard of many of these songs. They are songs, for the most part, about women who did something extraordinary, who in some way defied or threatened the stereotypes generally found in music.

# Our Image



Photograph accompanying "Ode to a Gym Teacher"

division and hatred between women, acceptance of humiliating conditions in return for a man's protection, and general passivity. There are contemporary songs of lesbian pride and love, and some very old traditional songs about independence and self-reliance.

There is one celebration of femaleness that I am definitely going to learn, "The Ampit Song." "It fits were meant to be bare then we would shed... for what's an ampit without the hair?"

All Our Lives is a first contribution to feminism and lesbian liberation's attempt to dig out the musical aspect of our hidden history. The songs are meant to be used — sung at rallies, on demonstrations, hummed and whistled. They record our history in a form that can be repeated and elaborated on by each of us.

by Cheryl Pruitt

## Dance

### Metaphors (Metaforen)

The Dutch National Ballet  
Royal Alexandra Theatre  
Toronto

Dance as a metaphor for life? A pas de deux as a metaphor for a sexual relationship? I can't think what else Hans van Manen could mean by the title of his new ballet. But the title is the only unclear thing about it. *Metaphors*, a ballet for eight girls and four boys set to the "Variations for Piano and String Orchestra" by Daniel-Lesur, is a masterpiece, and as a masterpiece is difficult to describe justly.

The constantly shifting geometric patterns remind one of George Balanchine's ballets for the New York City Ballet, but *Metaphors* is no steal as Rudi Van Dantzig's *Ginastiera* (offered in the DNB's second program) is. Van Manen's attention to musical phrasing isn't as literal as Balanchine's for one thing, and his dancers are less obviously the choreographer's tools: their personalities make a difference as seeing two casts dance the ballet proves. Van Manen has remarkable flair for the theatrical as well. The silent opening sequence, in which two girls with sweeping arm movements pass and re-pass one another, sets the dramatic tone for the rest of the ballet.

What follows — the sudden, often startling entrances and exits for the corps, the broken, chopped steps, the frequent juxtaposition of the austere and the

lyrical — adds resonance.

The focus of the ballet is on two pas de deux, one for boys, one for girls. The boys utilize familiar steps, lifts, and supported arabesques from the classical repertoire for ballerina and danseur noble. Emphasized, in an unself-conscious manner, is a predominantly tender and supportive element in the dance relationship. For the girls, striving for harmony, symmetry, and crystalline clarity is most obvious as each movement of one is complemented by a movement of the other. When the boys step in to partner them in traditional ballet style, the girls remain holding hands, even through lifts and supported turns, as if to emphasize the strength of their communion. Both pas de deux are unabashedly lyrical and, though not sexual in the pelvic-grind manner, erotic.

The four principals of the first-night cast, Alexandra Radius, Sonja Marchioli, Han Ebbelear, and Francis Sinceretti, were all fine. Ebbelear, in particular, was effective in the boys' pas de deux. His ambivalence was all the more remarkable in light of the fact that he is best known for partnering his wife, Ms. Radius.

One recognizes in Van Manen's cool, Apollonian dance-invasion a positive, deeply felt statement about the rightness of same-sex relationships. The abstract *Metaphors* stated this more clearly, too, than any piece of agit-prop story-dance could have done. It deserves to be seen and seen again. It deserves a better review than this — it deserves posterity.

by Graham Jackson

## Theatre

### An Evening with Oscar Wilde

David Renton, Producer  
Neptune Theatre, Halifax

Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wills Wilde is perhaps the archetypal male figure of Western culture. His incisive polished wit, in literature, theatre and conversation, sprang from a gay sensibility and exposed the dynamics of class and property in Victorian society. His flamboyant image in the popular imagination was the source of many of the features of the modern stereotype of the "artistic faggot". His trial and conviction in 1895 for homosexual offences was one of the most widely publicized trials of the past century, bringing to bear on a great artist at the height of his powers the repressive force of Victorian England. In an act of official sexual terrorism the effects of which are still felt today, Oscar Wilde's work, life and martyrdom are an important part of our history.

It is therefore noteworthy when there is a significant new performance of his work. David Renton, a major performer in the Neptune Company of Halifax, has created for the past thirteen years, has created a theatrical event composed of excerpts from Wilde's books, plays, conversations and trial, called "An Evening with Oscar Wilde". The production, which features Renton and Joan Gregson, came to the Neptune in 1981 and 1990. The first segment is fast-paced and witty, beginning with the children's story, "The Remarkable Rocket", and including excerpts from several plays, climaxing with a dazzling scene from "The Importance of Being Earnest". The second segment is impressive as the monumental Lady Bracknell. The second half of the show maintains a more serious tone. There are a condensed dramatization of "The Portrait of Donian Gray", excerpts from the trial and from Wilde's condemnation of the prison system, and an electrifying rendition of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", a poem about the execution of a young soldier.

Gregson and Renton are consistently polished, clever, and professional. Renton has paced the work well so that a great deal of material flows smoothly, leaving the audience exhilarated rather

than exhausted. The emphasis is more on Wilde's work than on his life, and the production does not explore the significance of the persecution of this gay artist, or importance of his gayness to his work. Renton does not celebrate Wilde's gayness, but neither does he apologize for it. This portrait is honest, sympathetic, and respectful.

The production is expected to go on tour next fall in Ontario and Western Canada. Watch for announcements and check local art centres and playhouses for times and places.

by Robin Metcalfe

## Press

### The Canadian Churchman

The Anglican Church of Canada  
Toronto, October, 1976

If I had not been forewarned I would have been surprised indeed to see the photos of so many stalwarts of the gay community staring at me from the pages of October's issue of the *Canadian Churchman*. This is the national newspaper of the Anglican Church of Canada, published separately and as a supplement to countywide diocesan papers. Almost eight full pages were devoted to the topic of homosexuality, including such items as the lead editorial, interviews with members of Toronto's gay organizations, and articles on the Metropolitan Community Church, gay Anglican seminarians and clergy, a lesbian deacon of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America, together with comments by psychologists and bishops. There was also much basic information on gayness for the average reader, who it is assumed won't know too much about the subject. Why the interest in it now? This May, the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada informed the House of Bishops that a task force had been set up to study homosexuality. Unpromisingly, the decision was the result of a parish's concern about the possibility of homosexuality existing within the church. The tone, however, of the pages in the *Churchman* very properly pointed out the need for such a study.

The lead editorial goes out strongly against the discrimination which gay people face: "Wherever there is a violation of human rights, there lies a clear role for the church to play... It could join ranks with those in the gay community working towards changes in provincial and federal law. It could work towards changing the public attitude that makes the gay man or woman an outcast in society. It could remove the terror of those within its own ranks who lead a double life in daily fear that their homosexuality will be discovered. It could do all these things — and it should. It's a simple case of 'human rights.' If the church really harkens to these nice liberal sentiments and adopts a civil rights approach, then there does seem to be the prospect of progress. It is refreshing that the *Churchman* avoids any sterile theological nitpicking about homosexuality. St. Paul's points mentioned only once, thank goodness. Theological wisdom is not one of the longer suits of Canadian Anglicanism, and one wonders what the task force's report, due soon in first draft, will have to say.

When one looks at the new sensitivity of some of the church's hierarchy to women or gays one might almost suspect a death-bed conversion. Perhaps the church is seeking good causes to demonstrate its relevance or perhaps it is merely reflecting, a little behindhand, general trends in society. Probably it is not too premature to examine motives. The bishop of Rupert's Land and the professor of pastoral psychology at Trinity College, Toronto, are among those who emerge from the *Churchman* as being very positive towards homosexuality. Yet overall, the general attitudes of Anglicans towards gayness appear depressing. There was hardly

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# Our Image

any awareness of discrimination against gays and the task force project was not considered a high priority for the church at this time. One layperson said that it was "too complicated and delicate an issue to legislate a policy."

Homosexuality, like any sexuality, is obviously very embarrassing to the church.

The **Churchman** articles will highlight the plight of gay ordinands and clergy who feel themselves forced to remain in the closet. The committee which screens candidates for ordination does not ordinarily question them about their sexual orientation, but woe betide an effeminate male postulant or those who actually volunteered that they were gay. You can be gay but you cannot act it or show it publicly. As the Trinity professor says, the gay ordinand "has to be political about it." Therefore, the gay divinity student is nervous and closeted. The bishop could be sympathetic, or he could be like the bishop of Edmonton who wrote not yet know whether homosexuality "is a physical problem or not." Gay clergy, also, try to hide their orientation. When Jack, a priest, has church acquaintances in, his lower Rob goes out because "we don't want to cause any suspicion." The dean of St. James Cathedral, Toronto, hopes that some homosexual clergy would try to remain celibate. Looking at all this, one can imagine how destructive the church might be for the personality of a gay priest or ordinand. The closet seems strangely at variance with the church's teachings about openness and the need for personal growth. Perhaps the time is coming when publicly open and proud gay women or men will present themselves for ordination in the Anglican Church of Canada.

The October **Churchman** carries reports on the impending ordination of women to the priesthood. These women have persisted with determination in a hard struggle against discrimination. There is a lesson here for gays which, it takes, may put an end to second class status within the church.

by Chris Headon □

## Canadian Theatre Review

### Homosexuality and the Theatre

Toronto, Fall, 1976, \$2.50

The **Canadian Theatre Review** devoted parts of recent issues to select "themes" such as Beverly Sills's plays, the theatre for children, and theatre in Quebec. Those got 163, 91, and 118 pages respectively. Its current issue takes as its theme "Homosexuality and the Theatre," with a total of 36 pages. Disrespectfully David Watmough, Vancouver actor and writer, one of the several gay women and men on the CTR's editorial Advisory Board, edits this "thematic" section. Watmough's aims are, ah, modest: "If the present issue... raises some of the large questions surrounding homosexuality in our theatre (and society at large) it will have more than served its function."

Four short articles rehearse four different questions. Graham Jackson's quick survey of "homosexual themes" in Western drama since Aristophanes is, of course, already available in *lan Young's The Male Homosexual in Literature*, though Graham has revised his essay to include recent plays such as *Streamers* and *Hosanna*. Eric Bentley's "The Homosexual Question" originally both commissioned and refused, a footnote tells us, by Christopher Street — has little direct bearing on theatre but offers in a leathery literate style a familiar cultural analysis of homophobia: homosexuality is anathema to a culture based on conformity and exploitation "getting on" because it is non-procreative and values sex as pleasurable, not purposive. Bentley's essay is useful for analysing the cultural context in which Jackson's themes parade. (Also for showing the common denominator of Walt Whitman's "loafing" and Oscar Wilde's "irreverence.")

Eric Nicol, described as "a playwright and humorist from Vancouver," exhibits his putative humor — Nicol must be Vancouver's answer to Gary Laughton — in a piece on anti-straight discrimination in Canada's faggot-ridden theatre. This, explains Mr. Watmough deadpan, "provides balancing observations on a straight or hetero variant point." And Robert Wallace, author of *No Deposit, No Return*, alone meditates on "my responsibility as a gay playwright."

These articles achieve Mr. Watmough's modest aims. But they struck me as — to borrow a term which the chef stole from the thespian — hors d'oeuvres. We need a feast.

Three quite different matters are involved: homosexuals or homosexual "themes" in plays; plays by homosexuals (and possibly for homosexuals) dealing with the gay experience; and gays in the theatre industry. Where is the analysis, I asked myself, of these matters? Surely, I thought, there are minds capable of addressing these issues. Surely a main cause is possible beyond the merely stuffed collar.

I reread Mr. Watmough's introduction several times; it struck me more and more as a slick evasion of the issues. Why would, as he implies, a "trenchant affirmation of the homosexual contribution to the dramatic arts" be "a propagandistic appeal for gay rights"? Does he really believe (even as he publishes and praises Bentley's article) that all arts are not in some way propagandistic — especially drama, which is so intimately linked with the society that produces it? Why "no more than is such a thing as a straight play"? Just what criteria determine his alternate categories — "there are good plays and bad plays"? Whoever said that merely the sexual orientation of its playwrighting determines whether a play is "gay" or "straight" isn't there some connection between the fact that some gays "buy ranch-type split level homes," epitomizing "the middle-class sensibility" and the kind of frustration both straights such as Eric Nicol and up-front gays such as Robert Wallace encounter?

Mr. Watmough implies that self-conscious gays will accept any play by "a gay brother or sister" as excellent, forsaking all other discriminations. And that such people — "the militant youth" he calls them — deal uniformly with disagreement by labelling any dissenter an "Uncle Tom." These are lies, of course, and no less repugnant for their smart defensive rhetoric.

Whatever brought such an ill upon the CTR? I rang up Robert Wallace, whom I had recently met, to find out what he knew. A little. Seems that when he submitted *No Deposit, No Return* as a playcript for this issue, Watmough asked him to write an article on how he feels when he's called a gay playwright. Which he wrote. Then later, Watmough rejected his script and indeed ruled against publishing any script in this issue — on the grounds that he did not want to be responsible for any gay play being labelled as "gay." Last May, Wallace said, he mentioned to Watmough a number of gay people in Canadian theatre with interesting contributions to make to this issue; Watmough contacted none of them.

But curiously, someone else did. When the CTR managing editor scanned the contents Watmough submitted, he was distressed enough to assemble a panel to discuss many of the matters Watmough evaded, just two weeks before the issue went to press. On the panel are three of the people Robert Wallace had suggested six months earlier: playwright John Calder, actor Peter John, editor Ed Jackson, (Palmer and John, I believe, are coming out here for the first time in print. Bravo.)

The panel discussion addresses the issues that need to be addressed, the ones that few when one recognizes, as Robert Wallace does and as David Watmough does not, that "the barriers which impede equal rights for homosexuals in this country" are the same ones that "make gay theatre necessary and which demand that I make an issue of my sexuality."

by Michael Lynch □

## The Ivory Tunnel



Patrick Anderson

### Small Press Books

Bertrand Lachance's *Les riviers* (tentative) (\$4.50 from Air, Box 48688, Stn. Bentall, Vancouver) contains poems in both French and English, and in Lachance's useful, bisset-derived Canadian.

On first readings, this new book seems not as strong as *Cock Tales*, published three years ago. Much of it looks like sketches for poems rather than the poems themselves — a technique that tends to work out best with very short pieces; some of those are the most appealing things in the book:

you're all about love he says  
his eyes not yet open  
his mouth still glued by the nite  
where I can still taste myself  
his hair  
blacknite wind  
hiding his eyes  
is the sea I seek

And, old-skinning Creeley:

le  
garcion  
blond  
montre  
bien  
ses  
fesses  
dans  
son  
pantalon  
noir  
serre

Devotees of gay literature will remember Patrick Anderson as the co-editor of *Eros: An Anthology of Male Friendship*, a fine selection of homosexual tributes through to the 1950's. Published in 1961, it was the first gay anthology to be published since Edward Carpenter's *Love's Labour* almost half a century before.

As a Canadian writer, Anderson is either a legend or an unknown, depending on the company. Born in England, he became an influential Canadian poet and editor in the 1940's and '50's. Later, he made England his home base for the wide-ranging jorneys he transmuted into a number of stories and travel books.

Though he has made a number of return visits to this country, he is, in spite of his contributions to the national letters, often left off lists of Canadian poets by those who like their Canadianism neat.

Now, a wide selection of Anderson's verse has finally been made available to Canadian readers — and about time! *A Visited Distance* is a collection of about 70 poems, published by Borealis Press (9 Ashburn Dr., Ottawa) at \$5.95. Taken as a whole, the book is little short of breath-taking, not only for its sheer craftsmanship and control, but for the scope of its subjects, its evocation of diverse places (Canadian and other), and its quiet depths of feeling.

The style is British, rather than U.S. influenced; measured and purposely literary in manner; yet unlike so many who write in this mode, Anderson's language and cadences seldom sound forced or self-consciously old-fashioned. Perhaps the best poem in the book is "A

Boy's Pleasure", which is about an adolescent lying in his room, masturbating. Anderson realizes that the mechanics of the experience are irrelevant, and he resists, as many poets could not, a physical description, conveying instead the breathing, inner world. The poem, like so many in this book, works like a slow, silent depth charge — and then surfaces into the calm of the social world with:

Downstairs it's strangely easy. Tee is laid.  
He smiles. His mother smiles. What he sits down to:  
the good marriage of the honey and the bread.

Anderson's images are clear and often startling. In "The Road By My Door" he writes of "The Road... bare/moored/warm as snakeskin," and, wandering at night, "my face/spilled like a loosed sack into space." Scenes of England and Europe are as brilliantly evoked as the sounds and atmosphere of a hockey practice in the cavernous, chill Canadian barn of the poem "Rink", where the boys are "handing their sticks across these frozen zones/where I am gliding, twilight in my skates."

Though the settings and subjects are diverse, gay themes and references pervade the book: the almond-eyed, stilt-limbed "Archaic Kouror" in a museum, "pioneers of the male body"/... the male body is a doorway they stand in and fill with their heaviness... or, in "Memory of Lake Towns", a remembrance of a winking a boy swimming, thirty years earlier.

Other poems tell of "Strangers Brought Home", and of the "swimming-bath smells" of the Y.M.C.A. in Montreal:

Too many absent-minded inches to touch  
in more evasions than following hand-spans  
of the fingers' calculus  
can warm from abstraction  
"Boys put that sort of thing right out of their minds"  
they loom up taller than the longest stroke.

Even our literature cannot embrace and comfort them  
we have few poems for naked sixteen-year-old boys  
falling headlong through the doorways of themselves...

...in their cold room I know they are puntans.

...They have to run throw themselves away  
dive and be hidden again  
in the big pool in water and horseplay  
where even their magnified voices in which a hero might be trying to speak  
are muffled by echoes.

*A Visited Distance* is a collection with a consistently high standard that shows Patrick Anderson as one of the very best we have, one of the few — after *Afterthought*, it is interesting and typical Canadian publishers — that the blurp on the back cover of the book, which lists even Anderson's anthology credits, neglects to mention that pioneering gay collection, *Eros*, which, in the years before gay liberation, was so important to so many of us. Perhaps it was seen as a trivial thing, not worth noting.

George Hyde's clumsily-entitled volume of "improvised verse", in *Journeys Often* (Ortha, PO Box 1273, Anderson, SC 23622) was written thirty years ago and got him into trouble then with the Roman Catholic Church, in spite of the fact that it reveals its author was far from accepting of his own homosexuality. George Hyde eventually left the Roman Catholic Church and founded his own where he rose rapidly to the rank of bishop. It is unclear why he has now decided to release this early book as it is totally undistinguished, both as poetry and as introspection.

by Ian Young □